

LOVERS' SAINT RUTH'S

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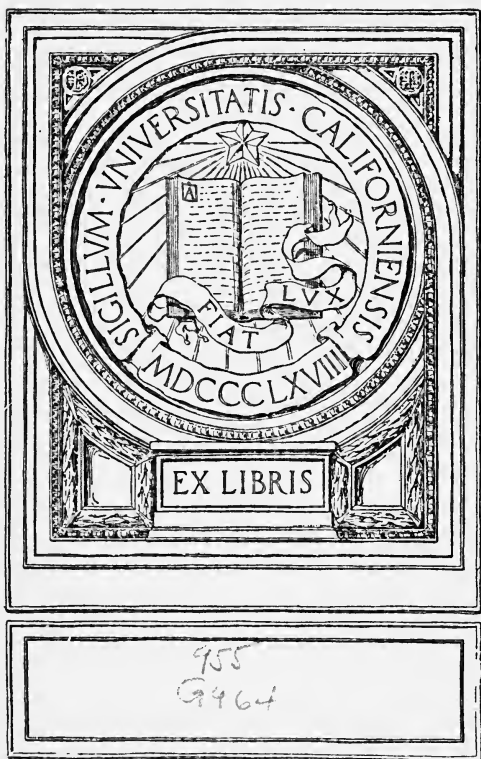


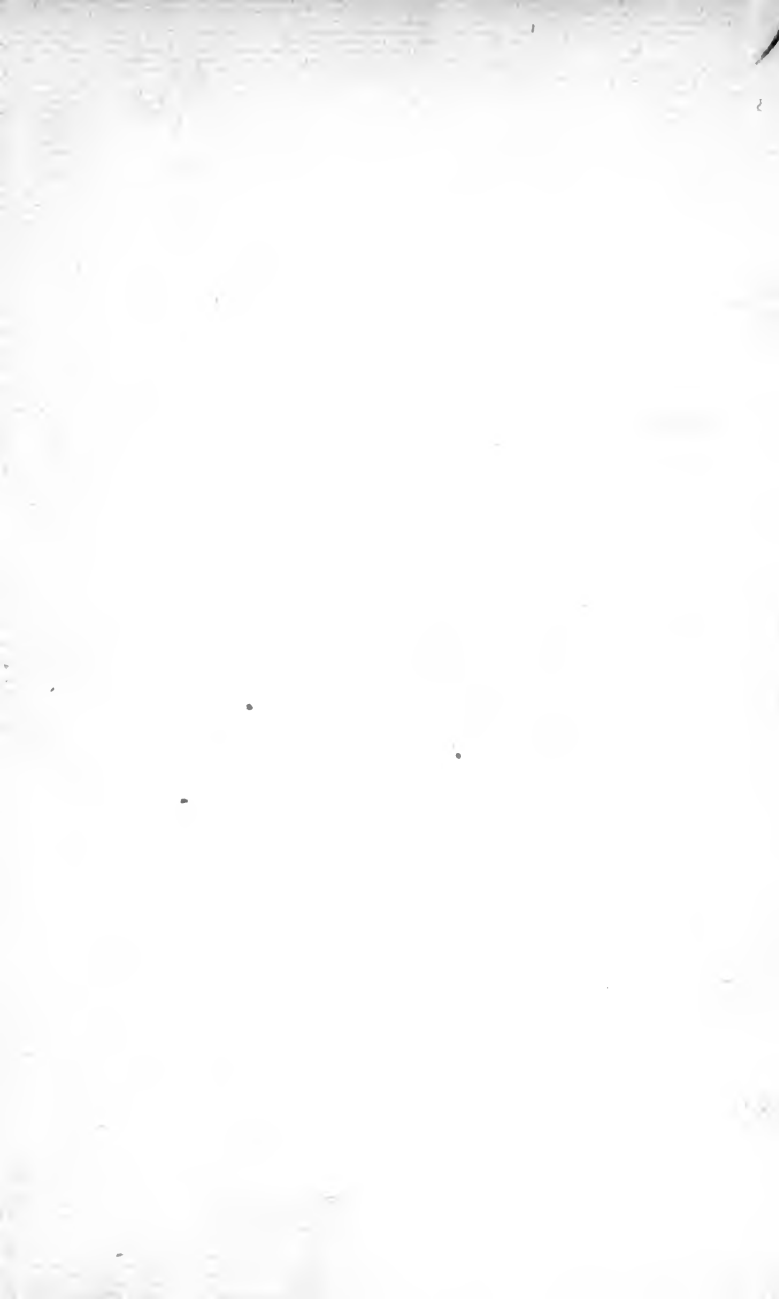
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LOVERS' SAINT RUTH'S And Three Other Tales

BY
LOUISE IMOGEN GUINEY

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TO WHOM ADDRESSED

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TO CLARENCE J. BLAKE AND FRANCES
H. BLAKE, A BOOK FINISHED ON THEIR
OWN WILD ACRES OF THE MAINE COAST.

October, 1894.

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

THE contents of this book have, hitherto, never been printed nor published. One chapter among them, *The Provider*, is based very literally on a tragic thing which happened, some years ago, in Dublin, and which, figuring as a cable despatch of some ten lines in a Boston daily newspaper, fell under my eye, to be remembered, and afterwards cast into its present form. In the September (1895) number of *Harpers' Magazine*, little Father Time and his adopted brother, in *Hearts Insurgent*, end their innocent lives from Hughey's strange motive, though not in his manner. It is perhaps worth while to state that my story was finished and laid by, prior to the appearance of the novel in its serial form, lest I should seem fain to melt my waxen wings in the

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THE
LAW OF
CONTRACTS

me better than ever when he found what genuine interest I took in his quiet hidden corner of ——shire, whither I came from London to pass a memorable night and day with him, after a sixteen years' separation; for his boyhood had been spent in my own Maryland, his mother's family being Americans. It was a little sober, pastoral place, this Orrinleigh, with its straw-browed cottages bosomed in roses, sitting all in a row upon the overshadowed lane, and, from the height where we stood, looking like so many sepia-tinted mushrooms in the broad green world. Just beyond us, in the near neighborhood of Orrinleigh House, the gray sham-Grecian porch of his ritualistic Tudor church skulked in the faint May sun. "What do you call that?" I said. "It is the one ugly thing hereabouts." He smiled. "Of course it is ugly, structurally," he answered in an apologetic tone; "Saint Ruth's was built in King James the First's time; I do not pride myself on that. But you should see the ruin, Holden! a darling bit of Early Decorated. Walk over there now with me. We have the time to give; and it is only a couple

of miles away." And off he started at his brisk bachelor pace, fixing his shovel-hat well on his forehead, for we were in the teeth of the inland breeze. "This enormity," I remarked, casting a sportive thumb over my shoulder, "has an odd name: Saint Ruth's." He corrected me in his most amiable fashion. "The title is not unique; and it has every precedent, pre-Christian as it is. Have you never heard, good sceptic, of Saint Joachim? nay, of Saint Michael, another person who might have proved an *alibi* if he ever came up for Roman canonization? Besides, the name has ancient local sanction. This Saint Ruth's-on-the-Hill continues the dedication of the other to which we are going: Lovers' Saint Ruth's." "Lovers' Saint Ruth's?" I exclaimed, keen at the scent. "Come now, Nasmith, there's some legend back of that; you know there is. Let us have it." And that is how I heard the story.

He told it not without reluctance, as if it were a precious thing he could not easily part with, even to an old friend. All along the road, as we went between the pleasant farm-lands, stepping over

golden pools of primroses between the wheel-tracks, little silences broke into his talk. Nasmith's heart is truly in the past; and humbly happy indeed it keeps him. We had been through the gallery before breakfast, and he reminded me of it, by way of prelude. "Do you remember how pleased you were with the great Vandyck on the east wall?" The grouped portrait of a blonde man, a blonde woman, and a child unlike either; how beautiful it was! the two unforgettable melancholy faces contrasting oddly with the ruddy dark-eyed boy in a yellow doublet, playing with his dog before them on the floor.

"Well, you saw there the Lord Richard, and his wife, the Lady Eleanor. He was the third Earl's only son, born in the year 1606. The house of Orrinleigh was founded by his grand-uncle, on murder and fraud. Richard, almost the only Langham with a conscience, had it in too great a degree, and grew up, one knows not why, with a diseased sense of impending retribution; and, therefore, when misfortune for a while overwhelmed him and his, it found him not unpre-

pared. His mother was a Neville; he had great prospects and possessions. Lady Eleanor was a sweet lass of honorable blood, a good squire's daughter, and the youngest of a family of eight. She belonged over there in Frambleworth, where you see the twin spires. From boyhood and girlhood these two clung to each other. I wonder if one ever sees such fast love now-a-days: so simple, so deep, so long-suffering, all made of rapture and grief! They were betrothed early, with a kiss given under the shadow of the king yew in the old church-yard; they both cherished the place to the end, and there lies their dust. You see, the original Saint Ruth's was a monastic chapel; and it was stripped, and left to fall to pieces, by the greed of the rascally Reformers, (excuse me; that's what I must call them!" muttered my filial High Churchman), "and it was nearly as much of a ruin in Lord Richard's youth as it is to-day. For a whole generation, Orrinleigh had no Christian services at all, and dropped into less than paganism; for which nobody seemed to care, until the architectural hodge-podge

on the hill was raised by the old Earl, and the people were gradually gathered in to learn all about a new code of moral beauty from the nakedest, dullest, and vulgarest object in the three kingdoms. As I was saying, the two young people made their tryst by the priory wall, secretly, as it had to be; for the Earl would not hear of penniless Eleanor Thurlocke for his heir's bride; and the squire, a staunch Elizabethan Protestant, favored young Kit Brimblecombe, or his cousin Austin, for her suitor, and held aloof from the Lord Richard, whom he suspected of having reclaimed his ancestors' faith and become a Papist, while at Oxford. That, as it happened, was true enough; and, moreover, the girl herself had followed her lover back into the old religion: so that there were disadvantage and danger of all kinds, in those days, behind them and before. The little church meant much to them both, the pathetic ghost of what had been so famous and fair. There they used to meet, when luck served, for what great comfort they could still reap out of their narrowing lives, shedding tears on each other's

breasts over that outlook which seemed so cruelly hopeless. But a terrible tragedy broke up and changed their youth, and it was at Lovers' Saint Ruth's that it happened.

"Eleanor was barely past eighteen, and Richard not one-and-twenty. It was spring twilight, when he rode down alone to the valley, galloping, because, for once, he was a little late to meet his maid. She also had started on foot, across the dewy field-path from Frambleworth, having for company part of the way an old market-woman and her goodman, who would not have betrayed the object of her journey for worlds. They left her at the lonely cross-roads, whence she gayly took her way west, with Orrinleigh Church, as it was still called, almost in sight. The next morning their bodies were found, not fifty rods away; and it is clear to me, that, hearing Eleanor's first stifled call, they had turned back to her rescue, and so perished at the hands of the wicked. With whom the guilt lay, none ever knew; the blame was laid upon the gypsies, I think unjustly, and three of them were hanged on these very downs. It was

a wild time; and desperate men, singly, or in bands, mad for food and plunder, and reeling drunk from cellar to cellar, were over this peaceful county. The squire's ewe lamb, whom, in his senses, a devil might have spared with a blessing on her sweet looks, was foully waylaid, and worse than murdered. In the face of agony and humiliation, her spirit fainted away. Hours later, when all was still, and the dazzling moon was up over the sycamores, Eleanor Thurlocke awoke, and, with her last spasmodical strength, dragged herself to the end of the lane, and on to the hollow stone step of the church, to die. It was past midnight. Who should be within those crumbling walls, even then, but her own Richard, kneeling in his satin dress, with a lighted hand-lamp by his side, his brow raised to Heaven? He had missed her; and he knew not what to think for disappointment and anxious love; and, sleep being far from him, there had he waited until now before the fallen altar-stone where they had so often prayed together. As dejectedly he swung back the outer door, he saw his dear, her thick gold locks un-

bound, her vesture in disorder, her hands chilled and bleeding from the stony travel and the briers. Without a question, for he was ever a ready courageous lad, he put out the lantern, and cast it under a bush; and, gathering Eleanor into his strong arms, first making the sign of the cross upon her brow, he climbed the hill slowly, steadily, and bore her straight into Orrinleigh House, and into his dead mother's chamber. He made no sound; but he left her long enough to get restoratives, and then hurried back, and laid her tenderly in the high-canopied bed there, radiant in the moonshine; and, keeping his own heart smothered, so that it could utter no least cry, placed the door ajar, and began to pace, soft as a tiger, to and fro, to and fro, to and fro, outside. When the white of dawn appeared, he crept in and crouched low beside the pillows. She opened her eyes, and, with his haggard cheek close to hers, stammered to him, piteously, as best she could, her knowledge of what had befallen. He did not speak nor move for a long while, partly because he feared so for her jarred mind. But he knew the

house would be stirring with the day, and events lay in his hands. It was a strange, inconsistent thing, but entirely in harmony with the Lord Richard's fatalistic character, that neither then, nor ever after, would he proclaim the true fact. To save her from certain slander, to wall her in with reparation on every side, was his one passionate impulse. He knew that having carried her by night to Orrinleigh, he must bear the burden of his own deed. He made his resolve to explain nothing, for her sake, and to act as became the overmastering affection he had for her. He breathed quickly and firmly in her ear: 'Nell!' She smiled faintly at him. 'Nell, darling, this must be our bridal-morn.' A low groan, such as made him shiver like the air around a fire, was her only answer; such a heart-rending groan of pure unreasoning horror as his ears had never heard. But he could not flinch now; the morn was breaking, fresh and undelayed, over his altered world. With the still force which was in him, and which, from his boyhood, could compel every one he knew, the Lord Richard said: 'Yes.' 'Yes!' she

echoed, after a while, as if in a weary dream, and fell unconscious again. Then he rose, and called old Stephen Bowles, the servant whom he could best trust, and despatched him, on his own horse, ere the sun was up, for a priest eleven miles away. And there, in his dead mother's chamber, with one only witness, and in such wretchedness, the two were hastily wed, Eleanor lying quietly, since they dared not raise her, and the hope of Orrinleigh kneeling with his curly bronze head buried in her white little hands. When the others had gone, for he had set himself much to do, he sought his father. Sealing his lips thenceforward against the mystery which had hurried his action, he spoke out, and told him he had married Eleanor Thurlocke, and that he hoped he might be forgiven if he had seemed undutiful; and before the old Earl, who was dressing, could show his rage, quietly walked away, and rode over to Frambleworth, and made almost the same speech, in Eleanor's behalf, to the squire. Such wrath, and curiosity, and excitement, and upbraiding were never in this neighborhood before; for the two young people

lived in the eyes of many who wished them well, and who looked for a great wedding, with masques, and dancing, and holiday arches, and public largesses of drink and money, such as had not been in mid-England for a generation. Wonderful as it seemed, the turmoil soon passed; and the two, never stirring from the very heart of the disturbance and opposition, somehow lived on, and were not parted, and slowly established a peace with their angry kindred. Malice itself could not hold out long against the Lord Richard's winning ways; and ever, as he grew older, he became sadder and gentler, and more to be honored by all men. But the Lady Eleanor lost the merry laughter she once had, and shrank, in great mistrust, even from her own family, so that it was plain at times that her reason was shaken. None on earth, meanwhile, save the lovers themselves, held the clew to their blighted lives. He never left her; he never travelled, nor went to court, as became his station, but sat patiently awaiting, at home, the crowning distress which he now knew must come upon them. Gossip broke out again, ere long,

as much as it dared, in the village taverns; and there was a lifting of willing eyebrows among the gentry dwelling near, when, in the autumn, the incarnate disaster, the child in the Vandyck picture, was born. They rang the joy-bells from the church-tower, and the tenantry came under the eaves and cheered until faithful old Stephen threatened them with his blunderbuss, and drove them away. The Earl was sitting at his cards, with his bad foot on a stool before him, when the Lord Richard came in, with a silken parcel in his arms, followed only by a couple of his sniffing hounds. 'Well, what hast thou there, Dick?' cried the big blustering man, not unkindly. 'Father,' said the young stricken Lord Richard, in his impassioned fidelity, holding the parcel forth, 'I have my son.' And thereupon such a mortal paleness came upon him, and his knees shook so under him, for the deceit, that he scarce could stand. Seeing him quake, the old Earl, a rough jolly creature in his better moods, laughed long and loud.

"And so it seemed to the only ones who sat tongue-tied amid the great rejoic-

ing, as if the divine wrath had indeed spent itself upon their house; the doom of the iniquity of the forefathers, as the Lord Richard would say to himself. What fresh and mistaken thinking there was to do, the miserable lad, being sane, did for both, believing that a curse was upon them, and that they must endure it, and accept the torture of that alien child's presence for some purpose hidden from human eyes. Their pact and horrible habit of silence weighed upon their hearts; and had not one constrained the other, she was very fain at times to confess, and go, if needs be, into disgrace for the lie. They would wander sometimes on the terrace, hand-in-hand, without speech, looking like brother and sister under a common ban. It seems impossible to understand this deliberate choice of a wrong attitude towards life, except in the light of that mysticism,

‘With shuddering, meek, submitted thought,’

which ruled the Lord Richard's nature. Meanwhile the infant changed to a noisy, bounding rogue with black eyes, whom his young mother hated. They called him

Ralph, a name not borne before by any of the Langham race. From his cradle, the poor waif clung to the Lord Richard, as to his only friend; and that saintly soul, as one might take sweetly a bitter penance, reared him in right ways, and encouraged or chided him at need, and won from him an awe and gratitude affecting to see. But the Lady Eleanor would never have him so much as touch her gown, which the maids about the manor laid to her troubled wits, and felt sorry for, without more ado. The old Earl, who liked the boy's health and pluck, had the portrait painted for the gallery; and even there you will notice that Ralph is far away from her, and at her husband's feet. Years of dereliction, therefore, these were to the Lord Richard, having no child of his own, and watching his intruding heir gaining daily some virtue and seemingly knowledge, and coming, either by nature or by his careful breeding, fully to deserve those things to which he had no right before God and the king. And the boy grew, and was worthy to be loved, so brave he was, and so truth-speaking, and so tractable, despite his fits of temper.

When he had passed his tenth birthday, he was sent to Meldom School; and his first absence lifted, as it were, the black load from his mother's spirit; and the beginning of her recovery, after all that she had endured, was from that day. There came soon to her and the Lord Richard an unexpected happiness; for the year 1636 saw the birth of their own little Vivian. You may believe that his father, perplexed by the fresh aspect of the problem before him, tried to solve it by prayer and patience; the good heart, chastened ever with much sorrow, and melted away with thinking, thinking. His wife, free of his morbid scruples, cried out at last irresistibly for the vindication of her little one. But the Lord Richard was visited by a prophetic dream, and was wrung with misgivings, less like a man's than a woman's, in searching to divine his duty. For he foresaw, of a surety, in his sleep, what a poor vicious thing his son was to be. All the estates, being entailed, were to pass to the acknowledged eldest, passing, therefore, by unjust consent, in this case, to an interloper, to the detriment of the true in-

heritor; and to maintain Ralph's right would be a legal crime. On the other hand, the great power and responsibility of which he promised to make such fair use,—what if these should become, in the hands of that other to whom they would be intrusted, engines for havoc in the world, since then to disown Ralph were a moral crime? Lord Richard wrestled hard with his demon of doubt, to no avail. In good time, alas, as it was ordained, when Vivian was a bonny babe in his third summer, the unforeseen deliverance came. Ralph Langham was thrown from his pony at Long Meldom Cross, and brought home for dead. He never spoke a word, but passed to eternity with his fingers clasped tight on the Lord Richard's compassionate hand, and a great tear rolling down his round brown cheek. His short career had been like a cheerful cloud swimming in the sun, and itself casting damp and darkness on the hills below. The strangest thing of all was the ungoverned joy which came, at the news, upon the Lady Eleanor, a joy dreadful, at that time, to those about; but when it faded away, all the evil else

linked with it seemed to fade too, and very shortly she was wholly restored, and became her own comely, gracious self again, even as she was when first the beardless Lord Richard had told her his love. So that the liberty of those hunted young spirits was established in the grave of him whom heraldry yet names as their first-born. They laid him yonder, in Lovers' Saint Ruth's. Where else but there? as if in unuttered thanksgiving that mercy had reached them at last upon its fatal threshold. There is the tower, Holden, and the broken top mullion (is it not graceful?) of the great west window."

We swung into the prettiest open space imaginable, close to a glassy lake, and found the fourteenth-century church, with its yews and leaning stones, before us. I went silently in at Nasmith's heels. The flooring was the perfect plush of English grass; the roof of the nave was living boughs. For a single huge ash-tree had rooted itself there generations ago, and grown much larger round than our four arms could span, and lifted its spread of leaves nearer heaven than the level of the walls. Ivy hung on

the chancel arch, and many bright-colored wildflowers, whose seeds had lodged in the crevices and in the blank windows, filled the whole enclosure, bay after bay, with a riot of color and fragrance. Soft green daylight everywhere caressed the eye. The chancel roof, of exquisitely groined limestone, was still unfallen, though it had a rift or two; and on either side, where the monks' stalls must have stood a dozen deep, there were crumbling tombs, with effigies in alabaster. I went directly up one step to a plain small brass over against the piscina, and pushed the weeds aside. Nasmith knew I should not be able to decipher the inscription, on which the rain of three hundred summers had been sifted in. Leaning his head against one of the piers, a good distance down, he looked over at me, and began to recite, in an agreeable monotone: " ' Here lieth Ralph, thirteen years old, heir while he lived to Orrinleigh and Gaynes; whom do thou, O Lord! receive among the innocent.

For Time still tries
The truth from lies,
And God makes open what the world doth blind.

A. D. 1639.' Do you recognize the verse? Robert Greene's. The choice of it was so significant it must have been the Lord Richard's doing. You will notice that the epitaph is sensitively worded; it is pure fact, and nothing else; and it has, too, an affectionate sound which has always been a sort of satisfaction to me." "How immensely dramatic the upshot might have been if he had lived!" I said. "The poor little fellow, *infelix natu, felicior morte*." I was astonished to find a slight mist over my eyes. "Tell me of these others next him, Nasmith: a knight and his lady side by side, recumbent, and therefore pre-Reformation." Nasmith's slow, radiant, indulgent smile was upon me, as he moved forward from the light to where I stood. "No," he said. "Look at the armor and the fashion of the dress, not at the attitude, which is unusual, of course, for the Caroline period. Those are the blessed twain of whom I have been telling you. See!" He pointed to the discolored raised Latin text which ran around the wide slabs beneath. I traced it out. "Pray for the souls of

Richard Esme Vivian Langham, Viscount Gaynes, and of Eleanor his adored wife, neither of them ripe in years, who together, in this venerable sanctuary, suffered calamity, and sought repose in Christ." There were no dates. I waited for Nasmith to go on. He did so, in that tone of grave personal interest which he reserves for these "old, unhappy, far-off things."

"They had to lead very private lives, on account of their proscribed creed; a constraint which to them was not unwelcome. Their good works, however, were known over the whole countryside, which is loyal to their memory. She was the first to die, in 1640, contracting a fever, and fading gradually away. There were two young children to remember her and take pattern after her, (would that they had done so!) Vivian and Joan. When the civil wars began, the old Earl was feeble and near his end; and the Lord Richard, whose principles and natural sympathies were all for King Charles, joined the unanimous Catholic gentry, and sought with eagerness the only use that seemed left

to him. His bright beloved presence graced the camp but a little while, for in his thirty-seventh year he was killed at the second battle of Newbury, while carrying the royal standard. They brought him back to the old chapel where he wished to be buried, and where none of his house have been buried since. Both these figures were made under his own eye, when his wife's dust was laid below. Are they not nobly and delicately wrought, and full of rest? His hand holds hers; he had always said they should lie so, as his namesake king and Anne of Bohemia, long ago, lay in the Abbey at Westminster. The ruin has taken its traditional distinctive name of Lovers' Saint Ruth's from them. All my parish maids steal in on Hallowe'en to kiss these joined hands, and wish themselves good fortune, and hundreds of ——shire sweet-hearts have plighted their troth here, under the stars. It has always been a place of pilgrimage, though its full history is not even guessed at. Saint Ruth's-on-the-Hill, my friend, can never buy or borrow such a charm as this."

As he paused, we heard the plaintive

interruptive note of a pair of wood-doves in the ash. He looked at me again. "I forgot to say that they were content to die, my martyr hero and heroine of Orringleigh, for they had won four years, at the end, of absolute unbroken bliss. They used to come down here every evening for a talk, or a hymn to Our Lady, arm in arm, and happy as children all the way. Their day of storms was brief, and it had a lovely sunset." "Ah, Nasmith," I exclaimed, like a sentimental girl, "I am glad of that. How did you know?" He drew his foot idly through the soft sward as he spoke. "I had the whole story in the Lord Richard's own hand. He wrote it out during the last night he spent at the manor, with his spurs and sword lying by him ready for the morrow: the whole tender, tragic story, with his curious mental struggles laid bare. He thought the truth due to his father, and to his dead stainless Eleanor, to clear her memory from erring rumor which had early got abroad. The manuscript was put away under a seal; and as soon as his son's will was opened, the Earl knew where to find it; I have seen it all scorched

and stained with the old man's tears. No eye, from his to mine, has read it since. You see, the next and fourth Earl, Vivian, grew up a graceless cynic reprobate in London, never visited his estates, and cared nothing for his lineage. His sister was little better. I ought to spare her and her second husband any vituperations, since they did me the courtesy of becoming my great-great-great-great-grandparents! Did I never tell you? The Langhams, bad enough in the beginning, have been a worse crew than before, since the Lord Richard's time. Almost 'every inch that is not fool is rogue,' as Dryden says of his giant. Francis, the ninth of the line, lately dead, and his Countess, being my very distant relatives, and impressed with my virtues, which were then being wasted on the desert air, offered me the benefice. The first thing I did, after setting Saint Ruth's in order, was to look about for materials for a history of the parish from a period before the Conquest. During the summer, they put a world of papers, grants, charters, registries, and so on, into my way, which had been heaped in some old chests in the tool-

house. One of these papers was that letter, a pearl in sea-kelp. I took it promptly over to Orrinleigh. The Earl was in his hunting-coat, swearing, over his glasses, at some excellent Liberal news in his morning journal. "Read this," I said; "it is one of your ancestral romances, and ought to be reverently preserved." He laid it by. A few days afterwards, while I was gathering fruit and vines for a Harvest Sunday, he pulled it from his pocket, and threw it at me over the garden wall, remarking that as my reverend appetite was for musty parchments, he did not know but what I had best have this one, especially as his wife and niece, having glanced at it, would not give it house-room! So I had the keepership of that mournful secret of the Lord Richard's wonderful love and patience, which came near altering the local annals I was to write. It was like the unburied dead; it tormented me. Not one of those vulgarians to whom it really belonged was fit to touch it, much less understand it; and I did not wish to add it to any collection, mine or another's. I hesitated a good bit, and

then I stole off, on a chilly Martinmas eve, and piously burned it here in Lovers' Saint Ruth's, on this tomb, and scattered the ashes into the grass." A gust of wind came into the choir, and the clock half a mile away struck one. At the sound, we reached for our hats, which we had instinctively laid aside, and crossed the little transept to the door, Nasmith first, I following, as we had entered. Once more, as we left the porch, dark with ivy and weather-stains, we heard the wood-doves, over our heads in the nave, utter a slow musical moan, one to the other. "Their souls," I whispered suddenly. "Peace to all such, after pain," said poetic Cyril. "*Amen*," I answered. We both smiled. How we two were enjoying our renewed society, back in a bygone England!

Hardly had we gained the road, when a carriage rolled by, with a single figure on horseback clattering alongside. A black-bonneted girl in mourning, handsome, if furtive, under her parasol, and both her companions, the younger of whom sat beside her, saluted Nasmith in what I thought to be a cold, perfunctory

manner. I guessed something, for his honest cheek flushed. "I fear these are the great folk of Orrinleigh," I remarked. "The men have selfish, stupid faces, more's the pity." "Yes," he replied; "you have seen some of the Lord Richard's degenerate descendants. I once meant to give his manuscript to Audrey—to the young lady in the carriage. I hoped she might value it. But, as I said, I destroyed it instead. You are the only person to whom I ever repeated the tale, and almost in the original words. Go put it in a book, if you like, Holden; make what you can of it; develop and proportion it; I trust your handling." I thanked him. "No. Your chivalrous Cavalier is too complex a subject for me," was my frank reply; "I feel safer with a history than with a mystery." I was a hardened republican novelist even then, and his senior, and not blind to the "human document," neither of the seventeenth century, nor of the nineteenth. "Nasmith," I began cunningly, "you were in love with the Honorable Audrey, and she refused you. How fortunate for you! Yours was the neatest and most

spiritual revenge I ever heard of: to keep from her what might have helped transform her woman's nature, stifled in an ill atmosphere,— the knowledge that she was of the blood of the saints,

‘Tho’ fallen on evil days,
On evil days tho’ fallen, and evil tongues.’ ”

He gave my hand a half-humorous pressure, his head turning neither to right nor to left, dear old Nasmith! He must be past forty now, and they tell me, moreover, that he is a Benedictine monk at Downside: he will care nothing what I say of him. And thus we climbed the balmy downs, back to our lunch at the vicarage, without another word.

OUR LADY OF THE UNION.

THE Surgeon and the Chaplain had been bidden to roast beef and mashed potatoes in the great tent; and the former, leaving its pleasant firelight, had come out through the night air a little before taps, to spread himself and his triumphs in the eyes of the officers' mess. The Surgeon was a widower in his early prime, and tenderly condescending to the known ways of women. He talked much of the two who in that camp represented all inscrutable womankind, Miss Cecily Carter and Mrs. Willoughby. They had come from New York on a visit, Braletton being just then in profound quiet. The Surgeon adored Miss Cecily, in which mood he was by no means alone; but he had his own opinion of her sister, the Colonel's wife. "The Sultan has hinges in him, and can unbend," he would say; "but the Sultana — O Jeru-

saalem, my Happy Home!" He had also discovered that the train of trunks at the sutler's, objects of deep and incessant objurgation, were hall-marked "A. W.," and that Miss Cecily came to the war with one hand-bag. His auditors sat long astride their chairs, each in his hood of good government tobacco-smoke. The Adjutant's silver-coated hound was asleep on the boards, still as a little mountain-tarn among thunder-clouds. The gusts of genial mirth were suddenly interrupted from without by the even voice of the orderly: "Sergeant Blanchard is wanted at the Colonel's quarters."

A young man playing chess in the corner arose at once, and followed. All along the company streets, the lamp-light streamed through the chinks in the tents; charming tenors and basses, at the far end, were laying them down and deeing for Annie Laurie; and from the long sheds nigh, in the grove, came the subdued pawing and tossing of the horses. Robert Blanchard saluted, and stood outside in the dark, for the Colonel was in his doorway. "They have sent another commission for you," he said shortly. "You

deserve it; your behavior has been admirable, a source of immense pride to me, and to all my men." The Sergeant looked at him with a visible gladness. "I thank you. You know I prefer not to be promoted." "I have humored you no fewer than three times before," resumed the Colonel, in an altered tone; "I can't do it always. You are known; the General has complimented you. The rise of a man of your stamp can't be prevented, even by himself. You are meant, if you live, to move rapidly, and go high. This second-lieutenantship is the lowest step; mount it, in Heaven's name, and don't maunder."

The other hesitated, silent. Then he said: "May I have my condition, if I accept,—may I remain color-bearer?" "I can promise nothing of the kind. I fear it would be unusual, to say the least; it has no precedent in any service that I ever heard of. Don't ask me that again." Blanchard, in sober fashion, brought his hand to his cap. "Good-evening, Colonel." The superior officer was exasperated. "Bob," he exclaimed discursively, "you're a fool. God bless you!"

The drums began, quick and light ; it was nine o'clock. The Sergeant went back, cheerful as Cincinnatus refusing empery. Before he confided himself to his blanket, lumped on boughs, he made sure that a fold of old bunting on a provisionary stick was slanted securely against the canvas ; for he had a sentimental passion for the flag. When it was hauled down at sunset, it went into his hands until daybreak. He had borne it in the van since his first bloody day at Little Bethel ; it had been riddled, stained, smoke-blackened, snapped from its support ; but he had never dropped it, not when a minie-ball fizzed through his shoulder, not when, fresh from the hospital, he had fallen face downward from his dying horse, in Beauregard's plunging fire of shell. In this lad of twenty-two there burned a formal loyalty so intense, so rooted in every fibre of his grave character, that his comrades, for whom military routine had lost much of its glamour, loved him for it, envied him, and consistently nagged the life out of him with the nickname of Our Colored Brother, and other nicknames based on

other puns more or less felicitous. Because in New York, they had several dear friends in common, the Colonel, on the morning of the ladies' arrival at Braleton, had asked him to lunch with them. "My Sergeant, Adela," so James Willoughby, in his eagles, presented him to the wife of his bosom, "my Sergeant; and such a Sergeant!" For he read in her tacticianary social eye that a Sergeant was a minnow indeed for a Colonel's friend and guest, even if he were a gentleman, a cousin of the Windhursts, and the hero of his corps. And she wondered at him the more that he should be a mere color-bearer; a spirited able-bodied creature two years in the army, with nothing to show for it! He had no explanation to give her, but he had an unaccountable hunger, from the first, to confide his secret to Cecily. He had seen her from a distance, and his heart stood still there in the grass; when he came nearer, it gave him, for a certain reason, the veriest wrench in all his life, such as True Thomas may have felt when the sweet yet awful call came to him at last in the market-place, that it

was time to say good-bye to earth, and go back to fairyland; to leave for the things which can never be the things that are. He often found her sewing on a silken tri-color, and working its correct number of stars in a pattern. She had begun it in her father's house, for her brother-in-law's regiment, and none too soon, for the flag in use was aging fast. Robert Blanchard never saw her head bent over that bright glory, filling her lap and falling around her feet, without a tightening of the throat. And when she nodded to him going by, with that candid, affectionate grace which never changed, it reminded him inevitably of something which made him happy and unhappy. He could not remember, he said to himself, when he had not loved her, and yet they had never met until this Virginian winter of 1863.

Cecily had taken up her abode in a wee log-house built for her as an ell from the Colonel's tent, delighting much in its frugalities and small hardships. She was becoming attached to the sights and sounds of camp-life: the tags and tassels, the shining accoutrements, and the endless

scouring and brushing thereof; the rosy drummer-boy; the company drills in the rain; the hollow pyramids of the stacked short bayonets; the muddy wells on the bluish and reddish lowlands; the loud sing-song of the little bearded Corporal interruptedly reading *David Copperfield* to a ring of enraptured privates; the welcome drone of the cook announcing his menu; the arrival of despatches, with the thundering and jingling of the cavalry heard a mile away; even the occasional alarms. The long inactions under McClellan, hateful to her mettlesome brother-in-law and to his men, proved pleasant enough to Cecily; she never lacked entertainment. While Adela was at her accurate toilets, and the Colonel, a severe disciplinarian, busy with his troops, she, active and curiously adventurous, walked or rode about alone.

The nine-hundred-acred Brale house topped the hill not far away; the owner, a fine old planter, lived there with the survivors of his family. Six months before, an infantry regiment had bivouacked on the place. A lieutenant, sent on the reasonable suspicion that a

number of escaped Confederates were harbored on the premises, clattered up, with an escort, to demand them. The eldest son, with true sullen Confederate pluck, refused him admission. After no long parley, the infantry lieutenant, losing control of himself, shot him dead: a proceeding, which, when it came to the ears of the authorities, cost the bully his commission. The two other sons, Julian and Stephen, were then in the Southern army; the younger had since perished from fever. To this doomed and outraged household, shut in from the world, hopelessly embittered against the Government in whose name murder and devastation stalked, Colonel Willoughby appeared as a new and strange being. He made it his business to see that there were no trespassings, and that the Brales lived not only in peace, but in comfort. He rode out repeatedly to the picket-lines, where a goodly quantity of commissary supplies, spirits, flour, tobacco, tea, and coffee, and divers other necessities difficult to obtain, were handed over to the slaves in exchange for the chickens, milk, and eggs. On several occasions, he had ridden as far

as the door, once to give the married daughter her pass through the lines; once to bring her little girl, who was ill, some delicacies sent in a hamper from his own home. These things broke the proud Brale hearts. They barely thanked him; his Federal uniform was like a dagger in their eyes. But a while ago, when they heard that his wife and his sister were coming to Braleton from the north, the stately old squire had sent him a royal gift, with a short letter in the style of the last century. The gift was Molly, the beautiful black, famous all over the country for her strength and speed; and on her back was a saddle of magnificent workmanship, with a movable pommel, which might be adjusted to suit the ladies. While these were in camp, therefore, the Colonel rode Messenger, his stocky sorrel, and Adela or Cecily sat majestically enthroned upon the majestic Molly. The former was a horsewoman of experience, erect, neat, orthodox, approved of connoisseurs everywhere. But the regiment was in this, as in other things, all for the favorite; and when she came in sight, (with the dare-devil mare going it, six leaps

to a mile,) lying flat forward, like her own cavalymen, with breathless, laughing face, and hair shaken loose along Molly's mane like the sun on a torrent, — such a cheer as would go up from the distracted Eleventh! Cecily and Molly, in the tingling pine-odorous Braleton air, made a familiar and joyful spectacle.

South from the mansion lay an Episcopal chapel, now dismantled, with a squat, broad, mossy roof pulled down over its eaves like a garden-hat; and around it spread the small old churchyard, with its stones neck-deep in freshening grass and clover. From this point there was a most lovely view over the melancholy landscape, silvered midway with a winding stream. Hither Cecily loved to climb, tying Molly in the copse below, to lie upon the shaded escutcheoned tomb of one Reginald Brale, "borne in Salop in olde England," and to muse long and happily, forgetful of battles, on

"The great good limpid world, so still, so still!"

She and Robert Blanchard had had much constant companionship; it was natural that these musings should turn

much, and indeed more and more, upon him. Surely, he was like no one else; and his presence gave Cecily a sense of infinite rest. She, too, had her obedient energies and controlled fervors. A great crisis like this, holding great issues, brought the two so sensitive to it very near together. She felt under her, even as he did, the tide-wave of patriotic emotion, sweeping the more generous spirits from all our cities out upon its fatal crest. She had seen the companies marching to the front through awe-stricken crowds, watched for the bulletins, worked for the hospitals, heard the triumphal never-to-be-forgotten eloquence and music sacred to the returning dead at home, and felt to the full the heartache and enthusiasm of all the early war. These things had formed her, pervaded her, projected her out of herself, and brought her, lingeringly a child, into thought and womanhood. Before she knew herself for an abolitionist, the day of Sumter swept over her like a flood, and diverted all the little idle streams of her being. Her brothers found her against the old tree in the garden, the newspaper in her

hand, like one entranced; and one of them, soon to devote his youth to the cause of Michael against Lucifer, forbade her being teased to account for her mood. Unlike Robert, Cecily came of a soldier race, and from swords drawn, each in its generation, at Naseby, at Brandywine, at Monterey. That fortune seemed good to her which had led her to Virginia, a ground balancing in the scales of fate, and rich already with hallowed graves. To the living men about her, she was as march-music never out of their ears, to hold them to their vows. Subdued from common cares, Cecily was in the current of the national peril, inspiring and inspired, and open to every warmth and chill of it as if it were indeed her own.

She was on the hills, reading, in balmy February weather, when she became aware of a low whinny at her ear. The Brale paddocks were on the other side of the fence. A young colt was there, startled and timid, stretching towards her; then another came as near, and another, and the heads of the older horses, confiding, appealing, crowded

over these. She patted their tremulous nostrils, divining instantly that something had occurred to alarm them. She raised herself from Reginald Brale's venerable slab, and listened; the sharp ping! ping! of blank cartridges struck the oak-leaves on her left. Standing, and peering down the steeper side of the incline, she saw the familiar moving glitter of gold braid, far below; and, stripping a bough, and knotting her handkerchief, she made a signal of distress, and waved it vigorously. The shout that followed told her that danger was over, both for the gentle intelligent creatures in the enclosure, and for her; the reports ceased. A moment after, a man sprang over the churchyard wall from the road. It was the Sergeant, more excited than he dared show.

"Miss Carter!" His heart-thuds made it hard for him to be punctilious. "Are you hurt? Idiots that we were to choose this place! We might have known. Tell me you're not hurt, Miss Carter." "I am not hurt at all," she answered gayly, "nor even frightened. It was these dear four-legged 'rebs' who were frightened." She slipped her book in her pocket, and

took up her gloves and the dainty whip which Molly had never felt, save when it flicked a fly from her ear. "You are a brave soul!" the Sergeant said. Cecily took refuge in the significant flippancy of gamins: "You're another!" which was so apposite that they both laughed. As they descended the rough foot-path, the Sergeant longed to offer his arm; but he knew her stoicisms, her natural physical *savoir-faire*, and he chivalrously refrained. How nimble and graceful, how fawn-like she was! He noted the wide lace collar and the brooch at her chin; the sober Gordon plaid gown, not too long; the firm little wrist; the beautiful hair parted, and looped low.

"What were you doing just now?"

"A party of us were enjoying ourselves, shooting."

"Birds?" in a cold, regretful tone.

"Birds! No. A soldier, unless he is spoiling with garrison idleness, won't waste his genius for killing on innocent birds and their like. Besides, the artillery fellows over yonder have scared them away from the whole neighborhood. We were target-shooting with pistols. Oh, if you

knew the hot coals and icicles I had to swallow when I recognized you up there!" He looked ahead, and saw with joy that his companions had departed. "Here is Molly, and my bay is behind the rock. May I ride home with you?" He helped her to mount, and sprang into his own saddle. The lonely, lovely earth and sky were theirs together; they went slowly, slowly down to the ford. Molly was thirsty, or else perverse; for she paused, lowered her aristocratic little head, and began to drink. Presently Saladin, the bay, standing by her on the brink, did the same; and the two riders sat, perforce, conscious of their like silent sympathy and society. An impulse rushed on each to lean over towards the other also, to lay cheek to happy cheek over the shallow water, in their youth, in the sun. The Sergeant stiffened himself with an effort.

"Although it is a holiday," he said, scanning the distance, "and although there's no end of jollity afoot, greased poles, football, leap-frog, hurdle-races, and all that—and did you know that Mrs. Willoughby, escorted by the Colonel

and the Adjutant, had gone for the day? There are to be charming diversions at the infantry camp, and a ball to wind up with. You were asked, too, I hear; but you missed it, straying off to your hermitage."

"I am glad I did! Please finish your sentence."

"Oh, I forgot. I was going to add that this sort of relaxation, just now, might be risky, when Old Glory and I may be ordered out before morning to waltz to fife-music!"

"A battle? Do you truly think it likely?"

"I half believe it. I don't mind telling you I have a premonition of it, involving another premonition regarding myself. But what of it? Our old friend Cicero, I think it was, used to say that we are born not for ourselves, but for the Republic." He laughed, as if he had said a jocund thing. He had not meant then to test her feeling for him; but he had allies in the hour and its emotion. Cecily rejoiced in his cheerful acceptances, and remembered her impersonal pride in the circumstances of his

enlistment, of which she had heard on all sides at home. Her voice fell, unawares, into its shy inflections, its little wild spontaneous minors, as she said, seeing the horses rear their heads: "Will you please tell me, Sergeant Blanchard, how you came to join the army? All that I know is that you were abroad, and that you gave up your pleasure, and came back."

He began quietly, as they passed the stream and made for higher ground:

"It is quite a story. I was off on a tour through India and Egypt, with my college chum, my dear old Arthur Hughes. Neither of us had any notion of returning home, and we were in the middle of the best time two fellows ever had on this earth, when I had a queer sort of warning. We were both curled up on the window-sill of my room, in our hotel at Cairo, one hot night, sleepless, and enjoying a smoke. Suddenly, above the street, among the shadows and spangled points of all those near domes and pinnacles, I saw what I thought was our national flag, hanging, hardly stirring. It seemed to spring up out of nothing, in its familiar, varied

colors, to startle my eye. Then, in a moment, I perceived that it was no flag, but a living spirit, a genius, a guardian angel, whatever you like to call it, which bore the oddest resemblance to one. There before me was the dreamiest figure; a tall beautiful young woman in a helmet, the moon shining on the little spike of it. A long blue veil, bluer than the atmosphere, covered her face, and was blown about her shoulders, not so heavy of texture but that the jewels in her flowing hair flashed through it with wonderful lustres; and her garment fell away in long alternate whites and reds, like the liquid bars we sometimes see flushing and paling in our own sky in the north, when the aurora borealis comes in the March evenings. There she floated many minutes before fading away; and once she raised her veil and beckoned, and her eyes dwelt on me so imploringly that they have become more real to me than anything else in my life. I tell you it shook my heart. . . . Miss Carter, if you will allow me, I must say that the vision was like, was very like," — the Sergeant choked a little, — "like you. When I

first saw you, I was so startled, it gave me, well, almost a swoon. That is a novel word, and ludicrous, perhaps, but I can use no other. At any rate, the resemblance has drawn me towards you, I can't say how strongly or how much. Please forgive me." For Cecily's wild-rose face was warm.

"I had forgotten all about Arthur. But when I turned to clutch him in my excitement, my first glance told me that he had not seen the phantom, and that he would deride my faith in it. So I tried to laugh off my sudden attack of second-sight; but it was of no use. I dropped into silence when it was my turn to speak, and abandoning presently the effort to seem indifferent, I parted from him, and went to bed.

"It was the only ghostly thing that had ever happened to me, and it impressed me tremendously. For my part, I could get no rest by day or night; that influence was over me like a bad star. I racked my brain to explain it by natural agencies, and it only set me thinking the more of our blessed country being in some terrible trouble. When I came to that, I

jumped up and started for the bath, to cool off, and then changed my mind, and struck first for the ticket-office. Whom should I knock into on the way but old Arthur in his fez, fierce as a lion. 'Bob,' he said, dragging me into a booth, 'it's war, war! President Lincoln is calling for men, and I'm going home to spite the devil.' 'There's no choice. I am going home anyhow,' I said. 'What news is there?'

"The little which had travelled that far, I heard from him. Sumter was being fired upon, on the 11th of April, 1861, when I saw Our Lady of the Union. I call her that; but I never spoke of her to Arthur, or to any one. Before June set in we arrived in New York, and we volunteered. Arthur has distinguished himself right and left. He is in Andersonville now, dear fellow. I should hate to end there."

"A martyr is a martyr; the place matters nothing," the girl replied.

"I know," he said; "I did not mean to speak lightly; but I am one of those who cannot always avoid it when they feel much."

The Sergeant's cheeks were burning too, and he quickened his pace. Cecily did not speak, following the bounding bay. But a loneliness which she could not define came upon her; a resentment of the sacred ideal which could yet be to her friend his divinity, his beauty, his bride, in a world from which she was shut out as an irrelevance. And almost as soon, she questioned herself whether because of a tie dearer than the human, this golden-hearted Robert must lose, she in him must lose — what? For answer, the noble and foolish tears welled up from the depths, and fell into the folds across her knee. Her companion drew his own rein, and laid his hand upon Molly's.

"Oh, why do you cry? I can't bear it. What have I done?"

"Nothing."

"I did not intend to disturb you, to make you care about it, or pity me; I am much happier since that happened. Could it be — oh, could it be —" He gazed a moment upon her, absorbedly and absorbingly, and she turned away. For who can make conscious preparation

for the imminent? Sudden ever is the finger of Death, to the watchers; sudden also is Love.

They were under the shade of some giant pines. The young man vaulted lightly to the ground, close to Molly's satin stirrupless flank, his hands clasped, his head thrown back, fired with adoring hope. When Cecily inclined towards him again, he saw in her (or was it his bewitched fancy?) the remote, incredible radiance of his old day-dream. The great flush rolled responsive to his own clear brow. He shook himself free, and found his voice. "Cecily," he said simply, "I love you; you must know that I love you. Such a love has no beginning and no end. You understand that and me. Of myself I have nothing to say. You have seen me only among Willoughby's recruits; but I never wished to be elsewhere. Judge of me, as we two are, now and here. Can you, do you think you could be my wife, by and by? Tell me. Tell me!" Then Cecily, simple too, in the same tremor of exaltation, put out her right hand. He caught at it with both his own, and buried his face

there. His wide hat had fallen; the warm light was on his clustering hair. With a sweet instinct like motherliness, his maid, bending over, kissed it in benediction.

It was two o'clock when they crossed the ford, and the late afternoon found them still pacing on their roadless way, like the lost enchanted knight and lady of the Black Forest. They were less than a mile from Braleton, on the rocks, in sight of the tents, when they unsaddled and tethered the horses, and made the last halt. "Dearest," the Sergeant had said, lying at her feet, his elbow in the grass, "dedicate my sword." Raising himself, he made a motion as if drawing it, and held it towards her and the sunset; Cecily, in the same pretty pantomime, touched her lips to the viewless blade, priestess of a new investiture. "One thing we both love better than ourselves; is it not so?" She was not jealous now. "These United States, right or wrong!"

"Oh, no!" The soldier sheathed his sacred weapon. "Say justice, liberty, the rights of man; the things our United

States ought to stand for." Then the light heart in him laughed; and Concrete and Abstract blessed each other. Happy and silent, they lingered on the brow of the pine copse; a breeze sprang up; vast and gorgeous sky-colors spread and deepened. The Sergeant's uplifted face was fixed upon his betrothed. She seemed to dissolve away before him, or before him, rather, to be vivified and set free. Slowly between her and him, transubstantiating her touching beauty, gathered a solemn, changeful, wavering cloud-splendor of ivory, rose, and sapphire, gathered out of the land of myths into recognized and unforgotten fact. For a quarter of an hour he endured that mystical glory; then his head dropped forward on her knees. A thing seen was yet upon him: once more Our Lady of the Union, but with a smile as if of one assured at last of ransom, and ineffably content. When Cecily touched him, wondering, he shuddered, and brushed an imagined film from his eyes. She sat there, innocent of any magic, unaware in what potter's hand her spirit was so much fine clay.

From the depths of the vale the croak

of frogs arose, faint here and shriller there, then long-drawn and general: ever a most mournful, homesick, and foreboding sound to our armies in the South. The distant camp seemed ominously quiet; but on the outskirts of it was a dissolving shadow, a moving dark clot, there, a moment back, between them and the scarce-fluttering flag, and still there, now that the flag was hauled down, its bright hues effaced against the more vivid evening air. Presently the group of men, for such it was, scattered. Cecily's keen sight read what was written afar; the familiar figure of the one-armed brisk Lieutenant-Colonel in the saddle coming towards the hill, with others following on the gallop behind.

"You are needed," she said without preamble; "you must go to them." With emphasis and authority, slight and quick, yet irrevocable, she spoke. He turned about, and sprang to his feet from his enchantment at her side; for the divine day, the Sergeant's field-day, was over. "Is this the way of women, or only your way? You send me from you on a supposition, a scruple," he answered, plaintively.

“Go.” She repeated it softly, and with closed eyes, lest she should look upon her own heart-break. “It is unnecessary, as you know,” he replied; “but if you make it a point of honor, I am glad to obey.” He held out his hands, and she took them, cherishing, steadfast, as in a pact. Her voice and step were strangely unsteady; they held up the mirror, as it were, to his. What was there in a commonplace incident to move them so to the depth? In a passionate presentiment, he drew her closer to him. “Are we to be given to each other only that we may be severed, and suffer the more? What if the end should be now? Cecily!”

But the young heroic mettle rose to meet his. “Beloved, you are mine and not mine. You are consecrated for the term of the war; so am I. I will always give you up to your task. Perhaps you may measure by that whether I love you.” He looked down with a grateful sigh on her who so mysteriously held him to his sacrifice, and shared it, and through her and in her, on the old, old fate which he knew now was driving him to the cliff.

"If there is to be a fight, I want your flag, the flag you made!" he whispered, grasping at anything to hide this rending in him of the spirit from the flesh. "However, whenever I fall, I want to be buried in it. Is it done? May I take it for mine, before it is presented to the regiment?"

"Yes. You shall carry my colors here and in heaven. I will pray for my knight."

He kissed her once, twice, for the betrothal, and yet again for the farewell.

He took Molly, the fresher animal of the two, and spurred to the open ground below, breaking out from the wood-path, ready for any duty, on time. He looked illumined, detached, transfigured: a Saint Michael to be remembered after by his companions in the moral crises of their lives. The Lieutenant-Colonel drew rein, relieved. "I was wishing for you, of all people," he said; "I feared you were far away. There has been an alarm; we must sleep under arms. The Colonel and most of the officers have not returned. I will go back now. Take these six with you, and cross the railway tracks to Palmer's.

It is a rough road, and a long journey; but report as soon as you can." The Sergeant started with his bayoneted cavalcade in a dash westward. Cecily, apprehensive of something unusual, saw the slow-rising dust, and, ahead of it, the erect leader, scaling the horizon, and vanishing into the yet glowing sky. A pang unutterable tore her; but, uttered, it would have been none other than *Amen*.

Poor Saladin was tired enough, having been out all day long; and Cecily led him carefully to the plain. Every clapping leaf, every crackling twig underfoot, struck a chill into her bosom, on the overshadowing hill-slopes. She had played too brave a part under her mental turmoil, and in the presence of her lover, himself too easily enamoured of death. A spell greater than any he had felt was over her, breathing a blackness between her and the light. Now her ample courage was fast giving out. She saw a face in the thicket, and was barely able to nerve herself not to scream. A man, in a military dress she did not know, came forward, and raised his cap. It was Major Julian Brale, free at last to do

some scouting over his ancestral acres, alone, and with hot revenges in his heart. He was sorry for her, and angry at her discovery. He apologized briefly, and helped her to mount, not without concern, but with a scornful coldness of manner which he could not help. When she had gone, he returned to the bushes, cursing the Eleventh; for he had recognized the saddle on the bay. The two forces were on the brink of battle; but he was not an expert sharp-shooter for nothing, and if he could but get sight of that thief, that coward, that hell-born villain who had taken his old father's precious Molly from him — A moonbeam straggled in where he bent over, priming his rifle, and he moved from it into the dark.

Dinnerless, supperless, much too overwrought to go to bed, Cecily Carter sat in the Colonel's empty tent. For company, she had shaken out her great silken banner over the lounge, where the fire-light, falling on it, seemed to praise its divine destroying loveliness with a poet's Pentecostal tongue. Once she murmured prayerfully: "Dear Robert, dear Robert." Something not herself had bade him go,

and he was gone; there was all of herself now in these fears. The little parting from him which she was enduring became magnified and abiding, so that she looked upon him slain, and thought with a sort of joyous satisfaction how under the buttons of his old blue jacket, where nobody, not even his mother, knew of them, were rose-leaves all about the open wound next his heart; rose-leaves pressed most fervently, one by one, to her lips, and laid there. Other caress she could not give him; though she was his, he was the Republic's, for ever and ever. Again, she saw him carried on a howitzer to a green lonely place. A stone reared itself before her, and she read upon it an odd inscription: *If ye seek the summit of true honor, hasten with all speed into that heavenly country.* She started up. Was her brain indeed giving way? Who had spoken? Where had she heard those words? How piercing a beauty they had! Were they in the Church ritual? What did they mean? Why should they hound her from her rest?

The Colonel's little ormolu clock struck eleven. Almost on the stroke, the de-

layed revellers entered. Adela could not fail to notice her sister's nervousness, but attributed it to anxiety for herself. The Sultana of the Surgeon's christening had been prodigally feasted and flattered; she had come home with an armful of hothouse flowers, effulgent with gratification, and in a talking mood. The Colonel's boy brought in the lamps. When the Colonel himself followed, grown grim with the sudden tension and commotion about, his remark was to the point. "I'm afraid you women will have to get out of camp, quick. I smell powder. It is likely to be damned disagreeable." His handsome, worldly wife, coming, butterfly-like, in yellow, out of her dark wrappings, fixed him with her censorious eye. "James Willoughby! You have been drinking." He was wont, on such occasions, to cast a comical appealing glance at Cecily, of whom he was fond. She did not smile in return, and her pallor touched him; so that he went over to her at once. "What's the matter, child?" he asked, with affectionate anxiety. But an approaching clang and clatter, and the challenge of the sentry without, took

from him what he meant to say; he left Cecily to her sister, and hurried into the air. His going added to her trouble; and yet she would have had no solace in keeping a friend near. Oh, the stress and strain of dull daily incident upon that inner universe, frangible as a bubble, where she and Robert had begun to live!—she and Robert, and the Love of Country alone, for between this and them must be union everlasting. Oh, the tyranny of all that is, laid upon him, faithful in his place; upon her, faithful in hers; the speechless dealings of lonely lovers with the Lone!

Private Cobbe, being foremost, saluted breathlessly: “Colonel, the pickets are being driven in; the enemy is advancing.” The gallant fellow pressed his hand to his thigh; he was wounded, and he was soldier enough to feel that wound an ignominy which had been received obscurely, and elsewhere than on the field. Immediately, all along the tents, arose the multitudinous yet unconfused cries of “Form!” and “Fall in!” from the captains; the flapping guidons were borne hither and thither to their places, and the thousand horses, wheeling on their danc-

ing hoofs by the gleam of lantern and torch under the watery moon, began to make huge, fantastic shadows along the old parade-ground. The Colonel, drawing on his gauntlets, and still afoot, noticed for the first time that Cobbe and McGrath held between them, each with an arm around him, an officer. For an instant, in the imperfect light, he thought him some prisoner, until he recognized, in a flash, Molly with her great liquid, excited eyes, Molly with her even mane hanging wet and limp, confronting him. Private McGrath had held in until now. He blurted: "I'm afraid he's gone, sir." The Colonel took a step forward, as if it were into eternity. The Surgeon, standing by, echoed after him: "My God!"

They lifted their friend down together, and carried him in, and laid him with extreme gentleness where by chance the new flag, a kingly winding-sheet, was above him and under. The Surgeon bent very low for a while over the lounge. The many in the tent, used to calamity less great than the loss of their best, held their breath; the Adjutant's dog, close to his master's legs, lifted his long gray

throat and crooned softly and mournfully, as the band outside, far down the disparting columns, broke into a loud, thrilling strain, impatient for victory. The Sergeant was dead, with a ball in his breast. No one moved until Cecily groaned and dropped.

AN EVENT ON THE RIVER.

MORNING lay over Portsmouth and her great stretches of opaline sea. The little islands, north to the Maine shore, and east to the harbor-buoys, were ablaze with red and yellow bushes to the water-brink; the low-masted gunlows were beating out like a flock of dingy gulls; and from afar, pleasantly, musically, sounded the bugle at the Navy Yard. The Honorable Langdon Openshaw, standing among ruinous warehouses and wharves, built by the Sheafes in the hour of their commercial glory under the second George, looked down upon the clear Piscataqua at full flood, breathing between its day-long, Samson-like tugs at the yet enduring piers. It was a lonely spot; the wind had a way there, sometimes, of waking momentary, half-imagined odors, the ghosts of the cargoes of wines and spices in the prodigal past.

His own solitude, the washing tide, the one towering linden yonder, the gambrel roofs and ancient gardens, the felt neighborhood of the dear wild little graveyard where his forbears slept, steeped his heart in overwhelming melancholy. He had already passed a week at the Rockingham. It was a strange date to choose, out of all his free and prosperous life, for a first visit since childhood to the fair old New England borough where he was born. A sort of morbid home-sickness had driven him back now, in his distresses, to her knee. For the Honorable Langdon Openshaw, innocent of the astounding crime with which he was charged, was out on bail.

The accusation was the most inexplicable of things. His chief characteristic had been an endearing gentleness, which brought him the popular favor he cared nothing for. He was the captain citizen of his town; he had held, in turn, every office public esteem could give him; he was president of a wealthy corporation which controlled a bank. It was this treasury which he was said to have rifled, and its cashier whom he was said to have

murdered. No living creature was there in all Connecticut but laughed aloud when the report began to spread; but time and circumstantial proof sobered them, and increased the breed of cynics and sceptics the country over. The philanthropist, the good man, the Sunday-school paragon, forsooth, once again exposed in all his gangrened sanctity! Two sickening circumstances, in the dark designs of Providence, pointed at him with deadly finger. One was, that at the time of the robbery, there was an impending crash in his vested finances, since wholly and finally averted by his foresight and skill; the other, that sometime before, in the discharge of duty, he had incurred the enmity of the victim. Was it not possible, during Mr. Openshaw's interval of anxiety, he, that is, any other than he, might have dared retrieve his fortune, and silence the witness of his crime, George Wheeling, found unexpectedly at his desk at midnight over his accounts, and thrown down the stair into the vaults? But there was a more certain and horrible evidence. He had been seen escaping; he had been recog-

nized. The scuffle had roused the occupants of houses near; and these, looking forth by the city lamplight, saw the flying figures, one of them, alas, inconceivably, yet unmistakably, so help us God! the Honorable Langdon Openshaw. Had they not a perfect unanimous knowledge, for many years, of his face, his unique gait, his uncommon stature? Where was there another such odd and definite physical personality? As to the confederates, well, there were reasons, no doubt, why bravos should be hired.

Wearily, wearily, he parted his gaze from the alluring eternity in the river, and strolled a little distance to the warm wall, and sat down in the late September grasses against it, like the broken man he was. He took off his hat, a characteristic dark soft felt such as he always wore, and the air was good upon his brow. His thoughts reverted to old times. He had no kindred except a sister living in Santa Barbara with her family of daughters, and between them there had never been any marked natural affection. The distant cousin of his own whom he had married, had borne him no children, and she was

dead: a gentle, negative soul, to whom he confided little of what touched him most. He had formed no intimate companionships. No one save his mother, whom he lost in his boyhood, and whose maiden name he bore, had ever possessed much influence over him. He was a man's man, as the saying is, hitherto of any age he chose, and rich in all resources. But he had strong dormant affections, shamefacedly expended on public orphanages and hospitals, and on the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; and he felt rightly that he could have been fatherly, brotherly, even filial, with a son. Ah, if he but had a son! Bulwarked about with modern conveniences, that, his one necessary, he had missed. And here, in strange opprobrium, was the end of his career and of his name. "Lover and friend hast Thou put far from me!" he breathed to himself, feeling, for the first time since his calamity, a profound submission of the soul.

He heard voices in the windless air. He did not rise, for they were not approaching him. He could not help distinguishing the animated words.

"This is as far as I ought to go. I guess I'll say good-bye."

"They will miss you notta yet. Oh, please do, please do stay! I starve if I am absent. Come, one kissa more."

"No; wait till to-morrow, you great baby. Go away now, and do your best to be good."

"Alla righta; if you give to me one little song."

"Truly?"

"Truly, Anita mia. I desire indeed, this hour, the mandolin. But no matter: sing. All is quiet: see! it can begin."

Then the girl's thin bird-like voice soared alone, not in any expected love-lyric of the seaport streets, but in a Christian folk-song of artless beauty.

"All in the April evening,
April airs were abroad;
The sheep with their little lambs
Passed me by on the road.

"The sheep with their little lambs
Passed me by on the road:
All in the April evening
I thought on the Lamb of God.

“The lambs were weary, and crying
With a weak human cry :
I thought on the Lamb of God
Going meekly to die.

“Up in the blue, blue mountains,
Dewy pastures are sweet,
With rest for the little bodies,
And rest for the little feet.

“But for the Lamb of God,
Up on the hill-top green,
Only a Cross of shame,
Two stark crosses between!

“All in the April evening,
April airs were abroad ;
I saw the sheep with their lambs :
I thought on the Lamb of God.”¹

There was a pause after. Then Openshaw sighed. He knew they were in each other's arms, the morning heaven blessing them ; but with him it was spiritual darkness, and bitter evenfall. A boat passed below, the oarsmen curious ; and the young loiterers on the old wharf stood apart.

“My angel, my sainta !”

“Hush ! It is twelve already ; I must be off.”

¹ Katharine Tynan Hinkson.

“Ah, the time is so short! Cruel!”

“Dear, you are nicest when you are good.”

“Behold, I am.”

At last the farewells and vacancy; and then footsteps making towards the angle of the wall. Mr. Openshaw's stately head, crowned with the abundant glossy black and gray which gave it such distinction in a land of bald pates, arose upon the surprised view of the new-comer. He, on his part, with no question as to a gentleman's supposed midday slumbers, stooped, and offered Mr. Openshaw his hat. The two, confronted, smiled a little; both tall, aquiline, clean-shaven.

“I thank you. Perhaps you would rather have me say, *molte grazie*. You are an Italian, are you not?”

The other, wonderingly, but with native grace, assented. “I am a Florentine.” How he said it! Where did he get that gypsy princeliness, his clear pallor, the nameless magic that takes the heart?

“You speak English fairly.”

“I have been in youra country long.”

“And I in yours, many years ago.”
Now Openshaw was dallying, and con-

sciously. What impelled him to open sociabilities with such an one, he did not know. This stripling of another grade reminded him dimly of something, and teased his eye. "What a bearing the fellow has!" he thought again. Having snapped every tie with his own life, he could afford to be interested in that of others. He took pleasure in the diverting accent and idiom, and the abandon with which the loose, rough clothes were worn.

"Florence is the most beautiful of cities. You ought almost to go back." It relieved his heart somehow, the foolish commonplace, as might the colloquy about the weather among aristocrats in the tumbrils of the French Revolution. All time hung a mortal weight upon his hands; nor did the un-Americanized stranger seem to be in a hurry. But now he started a little.

"Go back? Santa Maria! I suffer: I go back so soona that I can!" As he spoke, with the soft round harp-like Tuscan tone which the east wind of New England had not rasped, he glanced around apprehensively. "With money, nexta month, I sail on the sea, and I arrive."

"Well, that might be worse," said the elder man, indulgently. "May I ask your name?"

"Ralph Power."

"Ralph Power? That is not an Italian name."

"Sir, I know. My mother, she have the marriage name Potenza. Rodolfo, that is mine. I translate the two, and that is Ralph Power, whicha make it easy for the tongue of many."

Mr. Openshaw had drawn his hand over his eyelids, as if feeling the sting of memory.

"What do you do for a living here?"

"I serva the market. Once I assist to builda boats for the Capitan, but now he work no more; the beautiful Anne, she is his daughter. Ah, signor!" In-
genuously, boyishly, he sighed.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-two."

"How many questions I have asked you! I am afraid I have kept you from your duties. Pray go now."

The other bowed, and turned town-wards. But Openshaw felt on the instant a sort of loneliness. "Rodolfo!"

he exclaimed, "do me the favor to spend this." He slipped a coin into an uninviting hand, partly, as he would have said himself, from natural depravity, partly, from the sheer luxury of his own incognito, and that of giving away to a young man what no young man could inherit. "It may help you out of your trouble. Trouble is very hard to bear, sometimes."

If he were aware of expecting anything in return, from a poor Italian, it was the usual ecstatic thankful benediction of poor Italians in like luck. Once he had lived among them on their own soil; he knew the simple-hearted, engaging, vagabond breed through and through. But this specimen of it flushed and scowled, while trying to seem courteous; and his would-be benefactor was puzzled. As they stood opposite, they were of equal height; for the younger had drawn himself up a good inch.

"I am afraid you are proud. You have picked that up in New England."

Rodolfo answered resentfully: "Sir, I have the blood of New England also, and it is for me the destiny to earn my money,

most of all after what I promise to the beautiful Anne."

As he said it, warming thus into his very self, the eyes of Openshaw, watching him, were dazzled, as one may be who crosses an alcove towards a door in plain sight, and finds that seeming door a mirror. A little alarum-bell rang in his brain. He shuddered, for all the forces within him were rallying together: triumph, hate, revenge, deadly delight; things he had not known were possible to him swarmed into his spirit with a clang. He recognized, at a stroke, that this vagrant youth, this common workman, looking at him with no smile now, bore a violent resemblance to himself. He searched for details, lightning-quick, and devouringly. Yes! there were the dark, fine, pendulous hair, the small, close ear, the strong nose and jaw, even the large, slender hand toil had hardly scarred, the back of it smooth and hard as veined marble; how like the Openshaw hand, plain in the old Lely portrait, plainer yet in the Stuarts, on the melancholy walls of his own home! And what followed? The voice, significant, pro-

phetic, of the demon of self-preservation in his ear: "This may be the man who killed George Wheeling. This must be the man. Impeach him; clear yourself!" Openshaw, in his calmer mood, a few moments back, had measured the character before him. Whatever else it was, it was not astute. He foresaw no trouble in worming the secret out of him.

"Very well," he replied, as if æons on æons of thought had not passed since he spoke last. "I will take the gold-piece back, on your own condition: I will see that you earn it. Have you business on hand?"

"Oh, no. The venerable butcher, the fever kills him; we bury him, and lock the door for all day." Rodolfo was sullen yet.

"Then, will you kindly go into the square, buy me cheese, pilot bread, two quart bottles of Sauterne, and two glasses, and return by way of Daniels Street? I shall be waiting at the landing. I should like to hire a boat for an hour, and have you row me up river. Will you do so?"

The lad hesitated. Finally, touched,

or put upon his mettle by a seeming confidence, he set out, with the greenback in his pocket which Mr. Openshaw had given him. The latter, at this pause in their colloquy, was made aware that he was suffering keenly. He had exceeding self-control; his successes in life had sprung from it. But every mastered nerve in his body, having already undergone so much, and having so much to undergo, was humming like a beehive. He could not stand still. He wandered about, meeting few pedestrians, across Water Street, up Manning Street to Puddle Dock with its liberty pole, and again past the graveyard, lingering wherever he could command a view of the broad glorious anchorage, tragic with the exposed ribs of rotting ships. Into the happier neighborhoods near, he would not penetrate; this one had been happy too, when he was a child. There he saw but visions of greatness gone, of comfort broken, and an hour ago, could have laid his cheek to the old flaggings, and wept. But he had now a terrible just purpose, and for that he must save his strength.

He was at the landing later than

Rodolfo, who sat in a white wherry ballasted with his purchases, the oars already in hand. Openshaw rested his cane on the gunwale, and stepped quietly into the stern; they backed out of the cramped spaces, and shot away. The surface of the harbor was dimpling, little by little, with the great hidden swirls of the turning tide; deceptively glassy between its deflected banks, it gleamed like the thin ice which forms in November, and over which boys send pebble after pebble, and laugh to hear them chirruping. But Rodolfo had learned long since how to cajole the fierce Piscataqua; and tacking artfully by St. John's Point, he labored through the end arch of the great bridge, and gained the blue highway beyond. A train thundered overhead. Two women in the footpath, leaning over the rail, stared fixedly at the little boat, and from one sensitive face to the other, and again at their contrasted attire. They were Rodolfo's neighbors, and pleased that he had fallen in with a gentleman.

The cruisers were not back within the hour, nor within three hours. The whole world was to change strangely for them

both, meanwhile. The order of what Langdon Openshaw had intended to say and do came to naught, because what happens to happen is lord over the strongest human will. He had prepared his cunning questionings, as if to force his own fate, forgetting that the aggregation of outer circumstance which we call fate is itself an irresistible vortex; the trapper, and not the trapped. Up stream, by Frank's Fort, under a sapphire sky, while as yet little had been said, he found that his watch had run down, and he asked for the correct time. Rodolfo set him right from a cheap timepiece. As he handled it, there appeared, linked to the guard, an artistic bit of bronze, a tiny Renaissance figure, with bow and hound, the blown draperies minutely fair. Openshaw saw it, and the whole universe was not so manifest to him as that small ominous curio within it.

"The Diana! On your soul, where, how, did you get that?" It was familiar to him; he knew it, though he had not seen it for more than a score of years. The rower dropped it back into his breast, definitely.

"It is mine, and dear to me. My mother who gave it, she is dead."

"Did you say your mother's name was Potenza? Was it Agata Potenza? Agata Boldoni once?"

"Yes."

There was a thronging pause.

"When did she die?"

"It was sixa years ago; I proceed to America."

"Have you brothers and sisters?"

"I have, in Italy, twin brothers, older; their lame-a father, Niccola Potenza, live with them. But he is notta mine."

Quick, loud, sure, the queries and the answers fell, like the hammer-strokes of a coffin in the making.

"Your father was —?"

"How can I know? They tell me he was vera handsome, vera rich, and from this America. *Malfattore!* He steal away, and I am born after; and she see him not in her life, I see him not in mine."

The crew had apparently hurt the passenger, for the latter heaved against the thwarts.

"Once more. Was your mother ever married to your father?"

Rodolfo knit his brows, and set his teeth. "No."

For a long, long time there was no sound but the little singing keel on its joyous flight, and Openshaw's head was hidden in his hands. Rodolfo, of his own vigorous accord, took the way of Dover Bridge, across the noble inland bay, and branched up the shallowing Oyster. There by the bank, in the stiller solitudes, he shipped his oars, and, reaching forth, touched the bowed shoulder, not without compassion.

"*Illustrissimo*, look up! Tell me." Then did Openshaw begin, steadily, but hardly above his breath, intent the while on the image of his own youth before him, as if from that only he might draw courage to confess.

"I have a dear friend who, when he was no older than you are now, went to Italy. He spent his best years in a delusion, for he thought then he might become a great painter. His character, such as it was and is, turned to the things of good report; he was an orphan, with a competence; but he had had no home, and no moral training. Being something of

a recluse, he developed late and slowly. At a time when the storm-clouds in most young men's lives are lifting, his were surcharging themselves, and getting ready to burst. On his thirtieth birthday, in Ferrara, he —"

"In Ferrara, yes!" broke the eager interruption.

"He persuaded another man's wife to run away with him. She was a peasant, very young and innocent, with a sweet pensive Perugino face; she had been his model, up to her marriage with Niccola Potenza."

There was a sharp affirmative breath from the listener.

"Niccola Potenza was a cooper, with good prospects. He was considered quite a match for the girl; but he turned out to be dull, silent, and preoccupied. Little Agata was romantic; and her thoughts ran easily back to my friend. The fault was, assuredly, all his. He thought that he loved her, and so, indeed, he did; although he loved better, alas, the adventure and the rebellion. At any rate, he took her away boldly from her husband and her babes, and set up

life in his old studio, in Florence. The cooper, sworn to revenge himself, had nearly hunted my friend down, when on Easter Day he fell from a crowded and festooned inn-balcony, and broke his thigh. Somehow, after that, his fury failed him; and he sank, under his misfortune, into a sort of apathy. Things went wrong also with the lovers. Agata kept only for a while her soft, joyous, docile ways, and then grew restless and wretched, with the canker of a good heart spoiled, which nothing on earth can cure. She would spend hours in the chapel near by, her face covered, thinking and weeping; and then she would go back to her little household tasks, and move about in my friend's sight, her pale penitent face driving him wild more effectually than any audible reproach could have done. Of course he saw what was in her soul: the struggle between her foolish passion for him, and mortal home-sickness for the inner peace which had attended her old honorable life. He, on his part, resented the moral awakening in her, and stamped down both her conscience and his own. Against the voice within which bade him,

since he had done her an irretrievable wrong, to take the legal burden of it upon himself, and make her his wife in America, arose his tyrannous social cowardice. He dared not; he had a depraved but intelligent dread of discord and incongruities. And so, as many another man as weak has done, he served his æsthetic sense, and threw honor to the winds. He was never, I think, wilfully unkind to Agata; his selfishness would seem to me now less diabolic had he tried to estrange her from him. But as soon as their first apprehensive year together had passed, without any talk on the subject, he left her. Before he took his train, that night in May, my friend drew up a paper for poor Agata's maintenance. The sum was small, but much more than she had been accustomed to call her own. I know he had no forewarning of—of his child; he provided for her alone." Mr. Openshaw was speaking with some difficulty. "When were you born?"

"On the feast of San Stefano, the twenty-sixth of December, eighteen hundred sixty-five."

Rodolfo had been listening under a strain keener than that of physical deafness. The more nervously overwrought of the two at this particular moment, he was likewise the more restrained. A certain question was hot in his throat. Though he had not understood all of Mr. Openshaw's melancholy monologue, he had apprehended the heart of it only too well. But he said nothing further.

A flock of pioneer blackbirds, in delirious chatter, were gathering overhead for their autumn migration, darkening the narrow sky-space with their circling wings. Openshaw looked up.

"Those birds go from pole to pole to find—what? So did he. His youth was killed in him; and before long, nevertheless, he was cheerful and active again, and courted by the world. He came home to his own honest and normal life, and after a while he married. He had no tidings of Agata, and had actually resolved once to try to find her, when he heard what must have been a false report, that she had died; and he did not doubt it, for he used to see her faithful patient little face in all his dreams. From what I have

learned of late, I believe that he is most miserable, and near his own end. He does not deserve to hear of her last days. But if by letting me know, you can punish him through me, do not spare him. I will not, I promise you."

Rodolfo sat in the boat, immovable, the thin leaves of the bowery wild-grape flapping overhead, and flickering him with elfin light and shade. "My mother," he began in a low voice, "did the best: the grace of God was in her. Niccola was sick; the trade was gone, and then was mucha poverty. With me in her amiable arms, she return on the feet to Ferrara, and petition him; and, lo! the good cripple man, he pardon. There us four in one family, we flourish. The American money she could notta help, go among all till all are grown; she die of the fever sixa year ago, with many candles and masses for her soul; and because it is notta fit that my brothers spend on me, I ask Niccola's blessing, and come to America. That is the end."

Openshaw inquired presently, when he could do so: "Had you any education, as a child? Can you read and write, Rodolfo?"

"No." He sat sheepishly for a moment, then seized his oars.

"How have you prospered over here? Have you been able to save a little? You spoke of wishing to return."

Rodolfo quivered. "It musta be."

"Why so?" There was genuine tenderness in the two words.

"There is nothing of hope for me. I am in a greata fix. I leave, I go; I cannot stay. I have a sin also. Only my beloved, she know how it was I transgress, so thatta perhaps my guilt is not for eternity."

Openshaw laid the tip of his stick upon the rowlock, with authority. "Do not start yet; let the boat drift. You must be hungry with this long exercise. Pray pass me those things near you, and the wine; and while you lunch, I hope you will be as frank with me, Rodolfo, as I have been with you. . . . I look upon it as a miracle of mercy that at the eleventh hour we have found each other." He knew that the young man's blazing black eyes were full upon him. "I can help you. Only keep nothing back." He filled one of the glasses from the fizzing bottle,

and passed it. But it was struck aside, and the cry that followed was so sincere it gave the rudeness dignity.

“Ah! No, no, no. Sir, I touch the spiritual drink no more till I die. I vow to Anita mia, after the terrible night. For see! The evil ones, companions, take me on a burst in a city notta this, Hartaford, and thieve.” His voice dropped under the excitement, like a file of infantry under fire. “They thieve a banka; and I watch, in gin so drunk as Bacco; and when the invisible man arise pugnacious, I throttle him, and curse, and rolla him down to the cellar. He moan and expire, so that we go down to thieva more; but the city she hears, there is a sound, then a sound on top of him, and we fly, fly, fly, this streeta, that streeta, till I come back awake to this Portsmouth, and fall on my knee to Anne, and cry tears. Ah, my sainta! she comfort me in charity, and talk to me, and keepa me from the bad; and for penance I go vera dry always, not to be damn. I tell it not to Niccola at home when I go; and I pray to go soon, that the Statesa Prison notta hanga me.”

Such is the equilibrium between the infinite and folly, that at this juncture, as he recalled afterwards, Mr. Openshaw was eating his cheese. He answered, marvelling at his own composure.

“I read about it in the newspapers. You are in great danger, my poor boy. Now listen. There is a ship sailing for Genoa from New York next Saturday; and on her I wish you to engage your passage. That will give you a week to adjust your little affairs here; and you must, moreover, see your excellent sweetheart, and persuade her to marry you and go with you. Will you do that?”

Rodolfo opened his fine eyes very wide, and then closed them. “Oh, voluptuous as it would be, I cannot. The Capitan he make Anne deny me until I shall have many riches. She is a hand-maid of domestic service on Pleasanta Street; but the old one, he is proud for her, and with the mosta reason in all the world. I shall coop with thesea my brothers cooping always in Ferrara, and do my parta with my soul. For bye-and-bye we make a marriage; and then she will be content to live in the sympathetic Italy, where safeness is for me.”

“But we mean to mend all that, Rodolfo. Your father, whom I know very well, is growing old, and has a great deal of property with no one to share it. The least he can do for you (I am sure he feels that), is to put you out of the reach of want. He will not ruin you, nor throw you into temptations of a kind other than those you have undergone; for you are his son, and as such he must love you. But he will hope to hear by next spring, that you have bought a farm and vineyard, and that your kind kinspeople at home, and your wife, sometimes pray for him; yes, and for me. Trust me; we need say no more about it. He will have it all settled by law as soon as he is able, but certainly within a month.” He passed his hand over his hair, absently, and resumed. “You will go across the ocean now; and if my friend lives, he may come to you; but he may not live, and he may not come. It is his punishment not so much to lose you, or what you might, after all, be to him, as to recognize that his awful breach of duty has established between you what I may call, perhaps, in the long run, an incom-

patibility." Poor Openshaw, on the rack of his own candor, groaned aloud.

Once more they were crossing Greenland Bay, and the lone and lovely miles seaward. Rodolfo crept up quietly to his strange benefactor, who was absently gazing far away, so quietly that the wherry moved not a muscle under him.

"It is you," he said. "The 'friend' is a made-up. I know. *Padre, si!*" He threw his arms about Mr. Openshaw, his old hatred melted away, and lay there on his knees like a little boy, sobbing, sobbing. "It is for nothing at all," he explained with his endearing semblance of good-breeding; "but the gentle goodness of God. The beautiful Anne, — O you musta see her, and letta yourself be thank in so harmonious the voice of seventeen! she will taka me. Behold, I am so vera, vera happy." Quite overcome, he did not even raise his head when he was spoken to.

"Am I forgiven, Rodolfo? Can you forgive me for your poor mother's sake?"

For answer, the lad covered the hand he held with kisses of southern fervor,

and pressed into it the little delicate charm from his watch-string.

At the touch of it, the tyranny of yesterday and to-morrow, and all his suffering present and to come, departed from Openshaw. A divine felicity began now to possess him; he was grateful, he was at peace; whatever his retribution was to be, he embraced it, in spirit, like a bride. In his revery, he seemed to stand before the everlasting tribunal, with inscrutable truth on his lips: "Of this that was mine I was heedless. Because of my heedlessness, Poverty and Ignorance and Inferiority and Exile took him by the hand, and led him to the pit. He is rescued from the worst; he will cling to the highest which he sees, with an elected soul to help him; but what he might have been he can never be. It was I that sowed; let it be mine to reap. The indelible blood that is shed is on my hands, not on his. Visit Thy wrath upon me, for here is it due. With body and soul, will, sense, and understanding, from first to last, in every fibre of my being, I affirm me accountable for this thing." To the tribunal on earth, its magnate of

unblemished reputation had no explanation to offer. He foresaw only his arraignment, and the words with which to clinch it: "Gentlemen of the jury, I plead guilty."

Rodolfo spoke first. "I am so glad I guess, I guess from the teara in your eye, that time."

The tears welled up again as the other replied: "There is something else you will never guess, thank God."

"No?"

"No, my boy."

Rodolfo looked up, and smiled, without irrelevant curiosity. He was too content, afloat there.

The Honorable Langdon Openshaw took charge of the tiller, the son to whom he had twice given life still at his feet. With neither oar nor sail the guided boat came home from the upper waters to the port, in the mellowing afternoon, borne on the mighty ebb-tide of the Piscataqua.

THE PROVIDER.

NORA cried out: "'T is so pretty to-day!" The barefooted children were threading the slopes of Howth towards Raheny. Far-off, the city, with its lights and stretches of glorified evening water, was lying there lovely enough between the mountains and the sea. It was Nora's tenth birthday, and, to please her, they had been on the march all afternoon, their arms full of rock-born speedwell and primrose. "'T is so pretty!" echoed little Winny, with enthusiasm. But the boy looked abroad without a smile. "'T'd be prettier when things is right," he answered severely. Hughey was a man of culture; but his speech was the soft slipshod of the south. The three trudged on in silence, for Hughey was a personage to his small sisters; and Hughey in a mood was to be respected. He, alas, had been in a mood too long.

He had carried Winny over the roughest places, and shown her Ireland's Eye, and, alongshore, the fishing-nets and trawls; he had given his one biscuit to be shared between them all; and lying in the velvet sward by the Druid stone, he had told them all he knew of the fairy-folk in their raths, for the seventieth time. But he was full of sad and bitter brooding the while, thinking of his mother, his poor mother, his precious mother, working too hard at home, for whom there never seemed to be any birthdays or out-of-door pleasures.

Hugh was nearly twelve now, and mature as the eldest child must always be among the poor. He could remember times in the county Wexford, before his father, who was of kin to half the gentry in the countryside, died; times when life had a very different outlook, and when his peasant mother, with short skirts and her sleeves rolled up, would go gayly between her great stone-flagged kitchen and the well or the turkey-hen's nest under the blackthorn hedge, singing, singing, like a lark. They had to leave that pleasant farm, and the thatched roof which had

sheltered them from their fate, and move up to cloudier Dublin, to a stifling garret over a beer-shop ; and it was a miserable change. Malachi O'Kinsella, the cheerful thriftless man, with his handsome bearing and his superfluous oratory, was gone ; and his Hughey was too young to be of service to those he left behind. A fine monument, with *Glory be to God* on it, had to be put up over him in the old churchyard, two years ago ; and there had been since the problem of schooling, feeding, and clothing Hughey, Nora, and Winny. Then Rose, three years old, fell into a lime-kiln, and was associated with the enforced luxury of a second funeral ; and Dan, the baby, born after his father's death, was sickly, and therefore costly too ; and now the rent had to be paid, and the morrow thought of, on just nothing a week ! All of which this Hugh, with his acumen and quick sympathy, had found out. He worshipped his mother, in his shy, abstinent Irish way ; his heart was bursting for her sake, though he but half knew it, with a sense of the mystery and wrong-headedness of human society.

That April Tuesday night, when the wildflowers were in a big earthen basin on the table, like streaks of moonlight and moon-shadow, and the girls were in bed, Hughey blew out his candle, shut up his penny *Gulliver*, and went over to the low chair in their one room, where his mother was crooning Dan to sleep on her breast. It shocked him to see how thin she was. Her age was but three-and-thirty; but it might have been fifty. She wore a faded black gown, of decent aspect once in a village pew; her thick eyelashes were burning wet. Outside and far below, were the polluted narrow cross-streets, full of flaring torches, and hucksters' hand-carts, and drunken voices; and beyond, loomed the Gothic bulk of Saint Patrick's, not a star above it.

"Mother! 't is not going to school any more Oi'll be." His tired, unselfish mother swallowed a great sigh, but said nothing. "Oi'll worruk for ye, mother; Oi'll be your man. Oi can do 't."

There was another and a longer pause; and then Moira O'Kinsella suddenly bent forward and kissed her first-born. Like all the unlettered class in Ireland, she

adored learning from afar, and coveted it for her offspring. That he should give up his hope of "talkin' Latin" touched her to the quick. "God love ye, Hughey darlint! Phwat can a little bhoy do?" But she slept a happier woman for her knight's vow.

As for Hughey, there was no sleep for him. By the first white light he could see the two pathetic pinched profiles side by side, the woman's and the babe's, both set in the same startling flat oval of dark locks. The faces on the mattress yonder were so round and ruddy! They had not begun to think, as Hughey had; even scant dinners and no warmth in winter had not blighted one rose as yet in those country cheeks. Up to yesterday, he had somehow found his mother's plight bearable, thanks to the natural buoyancy of childhood, and the hope, springing up every week, that next week she would have a little less labor, a few more pence. Besides, it was spring; and in spring hearts have an irrational way of dancing, as if a fairy fiddler had struck up *Garryowen*. But now Hughey was sobered and desperate.

There was no breakfast but a crust apiece. The McCarthy grandmother, on the stairs, gave Nora, starting for school, some fresh water-cresses. Just then Mrs. O'Kinsella happened to open the door. Poor Nora had yielded to temptation and filled her mouth, and pretended, holding her head down, to be much concerned about a bruise on her knee. She could not look in her mother's honest eyes, ignorant as these were of any blame in Nora. Mrs. O'Kinsella went wearily to her charing, and seven-year-old Winny set up housekeeping with Dan, the primroses and a teapot-shaped fish-bone for their only toys. Hughey had already gone, nor was he at his desk in the afternoon, when his teacher and Nora looked vainly for him; nor did he return to his lodgings until after sundown. When he came, he brought milk with him, earned by holding a gentleman's horse at the Rotunda; and with that and some boiled potatoes, there was a feast. Hughey's vocation, it would appear, had not yet declared itself. He had haunted Stephen's Green and its sumptuous purlieus in vain. He had not been asked to join partners with

Messrs. Pim, nor to accept a Fellowship at Trinity. The next day's, the next month's history was no more heroic. There were so many of those bright, delicate-featured, ragged-shirted boys in Dublin, coming about on foggy mornings with propositions! The stout shopkeepers were sated with the spectacle of the unable and willing.

The days dragged. An affable policeman who had known Hughey's mother at home in New Ross, seeing him once gazing in a junk-shop door, finally presented him to the proprietor: "Toby, allow me t' inthroduce a good lad wants a dhrive at glory. Can ye tache um the Black Art, now? He can turrun his hand to most anythin', and his pomes, Oi hear, do be grand, for his age."

The junk-man, good-naturedly scanning Hughey, saw him burst into tears, and beat the air, though the giant of the law had passed on. That his chief and most secret sin should be mentioned aloud, to prejudice the world of commerce against him, was horrible. His mother had told on him! She must have found some lines on Winny's slate last Sunday, entitled

Drumalough: a Lament for the Fall of the Three Kings, Written at Midnight. Worra, worra! Hughey was descended, on the paternal side, through a succession of ever-falling fortunes, from a good many more than three kings, and used to wonder where their crowns and sceptres were, not that he might pawn them, either. The O'Kinsellas were a powerful aboriginal sept in the old days, and lived in fortress castles, and playfully carried off cattle and ladies from their neighbors of the Pale. Malachi O'Kinsella's mother, a heroine of romance who ran away with a jockey lover, and never throve after, was of pure Norman blood, and most beautiful, with gray eyes, water-clear, like Hughey's own, and the same bronze-colored hair; and it was said she could play the harp that soft it would draw the hearing out of your head with ecstasy! Now the junk-man was fatherly, and presented Hughey, in default of a situation, with a consolatory coin; but foregoing events had been too trying for the boy's nerves: he dropped it, and fled, sobbing. He simply could n't live where his po'try was going to rise up

against him, and wail like a Banshee in the public ear. He charged, in his wrath and grief, across the crowded bridge, and down the line of quays east of it, straight into a fat, gray-headed, leather-aproned person directing a group of sailors unloading a boat.

This person, sent of Heaven, with miraculous suddenness, and with musical distinctness, exclaimed: "'Ave n't I been a-wishin' of 'im, and directly 'e runs into me harms! Crawl into that barrel, sonny, and if you 'old it steady, I'll 'eave you tuppence." Hughey, foreordained likewise, crawled in. When he came out, Mr. J. Everard Hoggett looked him over, from his moribund hat to his slight patrician ankle. "I likes a boy wot 's 'andy, and 'as little to sy, like you." He resumed critically, "'E don't appear to be from any of 'Er Marjesty's carstles, 'e don't. Perhaps 'e might like to 'ang about 'ere, and earn three bob a week?" Hughey hugged his twopenny piece, blushed, trembled, twisted his legs in the brown trousers too big for him, and replied in gulps: "O sir! Yes, sir." Whereby his annals begin.

This perfectly amazing luck befell towards the end of May. Mr. Hoggett, going home, beckoned him, took him into a little eating-house, sat him down, paid for a huge order, and departed. "There's a couple o' lion cubs hinside wot ought to be your westcot, needs 'am and heggs. Fill 'em full; and mind you come to-morrow at a quarter to ight. I'll 'ave no lyzy lubbers alongside o' me." With which fierce farewell, and disdain-ing thanks, Mr. Hoggett faded wholly away.

Hughey, half-dazed, sat at a table alone, sniffing celestial fragrances from the rear, with the joy in his breast jumping like a live creature in a box. To quiet it, while he waited, he took up a torn journal which was lying on the nearest chair. At first, what he read seemed to have no meaning, but when some moments had passed, still odorous only, and non-flavorous, Hughey's collected and intelligent eye had taken in the dramatic political crisis, the stocks, the African news, the prospects of Irish literature, and the latest London wife-beating. On the advertisement page, one especial para-

graph in sensational print rooted his attention. This was it: —

“SERVANTS AND APPRENTICES, ATTENTION! Here is the best Chance of your lives. It will Never come again. *Trade with us, and you lay the FOUNDATION of your FORTUNE!* With every sixpenny worth of goods bought of us on any Saturday night, we give a COUPON on the Ninth anti-Sassenach Bank of Belfast. *Fifty of these* entitle the Bearer at the end of the year to a gift of TEN POUNDS IN GOLD!! Honesty the best Policy our motto. Best Material at Lowest Prices; come and see. *Do not Neglect your own Good.* McClutch & Gullim, Linen-drappers, No. 19 — — St.”

Hughey, the innocent prospective capitalist, took a stubby pencil from the only sound pocket in his habiliments, and began to figure on the margin of the paper; for he had an inspiration. “Mother would be thundherin’ rich!” was what flashed into his mind. Before he had done with his emergency arithmetic, ham and eggs, with all their shining train, were set before him. With them, he gallantly swallowed his conscience, for Hughey, like a nobler Roman before him,

was resolving to be gloriously false, and, for piety's sake, to trade his soul. He foresaw vaguely that he would not be allowed, out of his royal wages of three shillings, to spend full half every Saturday night, at McClutch and Gullim's; yet to do it was the imperative thing now, and that he felt impelled to do it was his own super-private business, and his warrant. Therefore would he keep his secret close, and make what excuse he might. He could not even think of asking advice; how should any one else be able to realize how he must act towards his mother? The angels had given her into his hands; and he knew at last what was to be done for her. She should be rich and gay, and have a coach, perhaps, like a real lady; and Danny should have a goat, and a sash with stripes in it, like the little twin Finnegans; and the Misses Honora and Winifrid O'Kinsella should walk abroad with parasols! Proper manœuvring now would fetch twenty-five pounds sterling next summer. But he would hide away what he bought, and never tell until the beatific hour when his mother should have the

money, and the linen, and the truth about them, all together!

Hughey went home in a series of hops and whirls, like a kitten's. He brought a flood of riotous sunshine in with him. It was supper-time; the children had each a ha'penny bun, and some tea. Mrs. O'Kinsella was lying down, with an ache between her lungs and her spine, after a long day's lifting and scrubbing. She felt the good news, before the child spoke. "O mother! 't is the most illigant thing's happened: ye niver heard the loike." Hughey's pale comely little face was radiant.

"Phwhere is ut, and phwhat d' ye get, dear?" Then Hughey screwed up his courage, and told his only, his masterly lie: "North Wall, mother; and a shillin' and six every week." "A shillin' and six!" shrieked Nora. "O Hughey!" But the critic for whose opinion he cared was not quite so enraptured. She smiled, and praised him, but took it too tamely, her son thought. However, he reflected that she little knew the felicities in store.

In the morning, his career began, and it maintained itself with vigor, inasmuch

as by the autumn he was of real value to his employers. He had many duties and some trusts. His orders all came directly from the benevolent bluff Mr. Hoggett, or from his mild reflection and under-study, a small, bald, capable head-clerk from the north, who was known as Jibtopsails; for what reason, Hughey could never divine, unless it was that his ears were uncommonly large and flapping. Jibtopsails sent him here and there with parcels and messages, and he had been faithful; he had made no grave mistake yet, nor had he been unpunctual. But every Saturday of his life saw him posing as a purchaser at 19 — — Street, where a hard-featured old woman, supposed mother of the supposed junior partner, served him always with the same ironically deferent, "Good day, sir; and what can I show you?" Jibtopsails inquired occasionally after the health of Hughey's family, particularly after Hughey had told him that Mrs. O'Kinsella was not so well as she used to be. For the rest, the sympathy of that gentle cynic made the child's blood run cold: he had such a paralyzing fear that Jibtopsails might call

there at the house, and talk to his mother, and say something about three shillings a week ! Kind people in the parish, if they knew, would bring her in wood, and coal, and wine ; but again, in the hallucination of his jealous determined heart, the boy prayed passionately that they might not know, and that he alone should be the deliverer. The dread of his secret being found out, little by little made his life intolerable. He had grown older since he had that to cherish in his bosom, and it seemed less delicious than while as yet it was nothing but a dream.

His mother broke down, and could toil no longer. Mrs. Drogan, who lived downstairs, began to come up with her mending, and sit between the bed and the window. Nora was clever, for so young a girl ; but she stumbled a great deal in her roomy charity boots, and had to be scolded for awkwardness by Mrs. Drogan, who had brought up sixteen rebels, and was disposed to command. As for Winny and Dan, they made a noise, and therefore had to be exiled to the street, foul and dangerous as it was, almost all day, while the invalid slept the

sleep of utter exhaustion. It occurred often to Hughey, and with increasing force, that to secure a future good, he was doing a very vicious wrong; that it would be far better for his mother to have the money now, to provide comforts and make her well, than for her to do without it now, and be too feeble in consequence to enjoy it when it would come, all in a lump. Heavy and sharp was this dilemma to the little fellow, as he labelled the great bales, or set Mr. Hoggett's dusted ledgers back on their shelves. "Phwhat ought I be doin'?" he would groan aloud, when he was alone. If he confessed to his mother, and handed over hereafter the total of his wages, there was an end to the big income sprouting and budding wondrously at Belfast, the income which would be hers yet, with ever so little patience. But if he should not confess, and, meanwhile, if she should not recover, — what would all the world's wealth be then to poor Hughey?

October was damp and dispiriting; Mrs. O'Kinsella coughed more, but apparently suffered little. Hughey still brought her, week by week, his pittance

of a shilling and sixpence. Ill as she was, her alert instinct divined that something ailed him; she pitied him, and worried about him, and kissed his tears away with a blessing, very often. Doctor Nugent was called in for the first time, one rainy noon. He told Mrs. Drogan, laconically, that his patient was going to die, and stopped her gesture of remonstrance. "Say nothing to those children of hers," he added, aside, on the threshold; "there is no immediate need of it, and the eldest looks melancholy enough without it."

But the eldest was at his elbow. With a still ardor painful to see, he raised himself close to the tall doctor, and whispered into his ear. "Phwhat wud save me mother? Wud n't money do it, MONEY?" The boy looked so thrillingly, impressively earnest that the doctor rose to the occasion. "Perhaps! That is, a winter in France or Italy might delay the end. But dear me! how on earth —" His voice wavered, and he hurried down.

On the way back to the office, Hughey crossed Augier Street, and stalked into McClutch and Gullim's. He had business with the old woman, imminent busi-

ness. Would the Ninth anti-Sassenach Bank of Belfast advance half of an annual interest? that is, would they allow him, Hugh O’Kinsella of Dublin, merchant’s errand-boy, what was due on his receipts of purchases up to date? He found that circumstances over which he had no control prevented his waiting until May: please might he draw out the eleven odd pounds now? The old woman had recently had other queries of that nature, which proved that the victims were getting restless; that it would soon be advisable, in short, to strike camp, and betake herself and her nefarious concerns to Leeds or Manchester. Her sourness vented itself promptly on Hughey. Decidedly, the Ninth anti-Sassenach Bank would do nothing of the sort; it was against the rules; it never advanced cash except in case of death, when coupons from McClutch and Gullim’s would hold good for a life-insurance policy to the corpse’s relatives. “And now g’long to the divil wid ye, ye limb!” concluded Mrs. Gullim, in a burst of vernacular indignation.

Hughey fairly reeled out to the pave-

ment, with wheels humming in his brain, and a large triangular rock, sharper than knives and smeared with poison (a not unfamiliar rock, of late), lodged in the middle of his throat. As he turned down the windy North Wall, among the sleek cattle waiting for exportation, and pushed open the warehouse door by the Liffey, Jibtopsails took his pen from behind his capacious ear, and peered over his spectacles.

“*Cead mille failthe, Brian Boruihme!* and how is the royal fam——.” He got no further; the young face opposite was so awry with the spirit’s mortal anguish that Jibtopsails was truly sorry he had tried to be jocose. It was almost a first offence.

And now, with much introspection, and heart-searching, and resolve, Hughey’s tragedy gathered itself together. On Sunday, after church, he had occasion to go out of town. As he wished to deal with Nora, he offered to give her a ride on the tram: a species of entertainment which she accepted with enthusiasm. When they were at the end of their route, they set forth on foot, up-hill,

over two miles of exquisite moorland, to the house of the retired first mate of the Grace Greeley, who was summoned by the firm of Hoggett as witness in a lawsuit. Nora was in her usual spirits, and her brother tried to wait until they should show signs of flagging. O the heavenly freedom of the country! the pleasant smell of damp leaves! But Hughey's heart would not rise. As they passed the sheep-folds, the pretty huddled creatures made Nora laugh, standing still, agape, in her blue faded frock; and he grabbed her roughly by the arm, albeit his sad forbearing tone was not rough. "D'ye love me at all, Nora?"

"That Oi do, Hughey O'Kinsella; and ye need n't be scrunchin' of me to foind ut out."

"Nora!"

"Phwhat is ut?"

"There's somethin' Oi do be bound to say to ye." A pause.

"Can ye keep a secret?"

"Shure, Oi can."

"'T is turrible."

"Niver ye moind, Oi'll keep ut!" said the loyal other.

Hughey lifted his face to the sweet blowy autumn afternoon, took breath, and increased his pace. "Mother is loike to be doyin' soon. Maybe ye didn't hear o' that. But she cud live a hunderd year if ut wasn't so cruel poor we are. Oi've been a-thinkin' wan reason of ut is she has too many childher. 'Tis good little Rosy is with the saints. Childher all eats and wears clothes, and is n't much use. If mother was n't ill, there'd be nothin' the matter wid me; we cud go on along, and Oi'd have power to do the beautiful things, Nora dear. Ye'd all be proud as paycocks o' me whin next the cuckoo'll be in the green bush down be the Barrow; only mother wud be undher the ground. So 't is long before that Oi must be doin' phwhat Oi'm meanin' to do. Now's the toime for her to be cured, and the toime for me to behave the usefulest to her is to-morrow, just afther Oi'm dead."

The younger child was bewildered, over-awed. "May the Lorrud have mercy upon your sowl, Hughey!" she murmured with vague solemnity, taking

in the legendary word "dead" and nothing else. Her light feet ran unevenly beside his, up the slope and down the hollow, and over stiles and pasture-walls, bright with their withering vines. She was all ear when her brother began again, irrelevantly and more softly, on his tremendous theme, so old now to his thoughts that he was conscious of no solecism in the abrupt utterance of it. "Whin ye dhrown, ye niver look bad at a wake. A man kilt in the battle looks bad, but not a dhrowned man. 'T is grand to be a marthyr to your counthry; howsomiver, the guns is n't convanient, and Oi must hould to the wather. The rest Oi can't tell, becaze ye're a woman, and wud n't undhersthand; but there's pounds and pince in ut, and 't is the foine thing intoirely for mother." He turned upon her his most searching gaze. "Ye'll be constant and koind to her, now? Ye'll be runnin' and bringin' her a chair, and takin' the beef out o' your mouth for her as long as ye live? (Shure Oi forgot there's goin' to be tons o' beef for yez all.) Promus me, Nora." She looked at him, and her wide blue

eyes filled ; and presently she sank down all in a heap, her face in the grass, her heels in the air. It looked like revolt ; but it was regret, or rather the utter helplessness of either. The boy never flinched. "Promus me, Nora." "Oh, Oi do, brother Hughey, Oi do!" she sobbed. He stood by her a moment, then with firmness followed the path out of sight, his slender withdrawing figure significant against the sky.

When he came back, the anxious Nora was on the road, whence she could see far and wide. Little was said as they returned home, through ways thickening with cabs and passers-by. But skirting Dean Swift's dark Cathedral, they heard the treble voices at even-song in the choir, and the grave sweetness of Tallis' old music seemed to thaw Hughey's blood. He drew his sister closer as they walked, and bent his curls over her. He had received a fresh illumination since he spoke last.

"You're what mother needs," he whispered, "and so's Dan, seein' he's no bigger than a fairy. But Oi'd be better away, and so'd Winny, for the

sake o' leavin' plenty to eat and plenty o' room. Ye'll give me Winny in her little coat whin Oi ax ye to-noight, will ye, Nora?" The child glanced up mournfully at her ruling genius, without a word, but with a look of supernatural submission. They went up the rickety stairs, arm in arm.

Mrs. O'Kinsella, who had had a trying day, had just said to Mrs. Drohan, rising with a view to supper for her husband: "Oi'm of that moind meself. Johanna Carr'd be a widdy contint in her ould age, if she'd had childher, if she'd had a son loike Hughey. Me blessid darlint! he's gould an' dimonds. By the grace o' God Almighty, Oi cud bow me head if He tuk the rest away from me, but He cudn't part me and the bhoy, me and the bhoy." She began to cough again.

Her son asked to sit up late. "Oi'd be writin', mother," he pleaded. Her pride in him came to her poor thin cheeks. "'Tis a Bard ye'll be yet, loike the wans your father read about in the histry!" Hughey knew he had been misunderstood; but trifles were

trifles, and must be ignored, now that the hour of action had struck.

Having taken off his shoes, he sat down in the broken chair by the table, with his pencil, and the paper which Jibtopsails had given him. The inmates of the room were all unconscious in half an hour, except himself and Nora. She, in a fever of excitement, kept vigil, lying as usual since consumption had come openly under their roof, between Winny and the baby. Winny, dirty, hungry, and tired out with dancing to a hurdy-gurdy, had fallen asleep in her clothes. Nora did not require her to undress. These were the three letters which Hughey wrote.

Mr. Everard Hoggett, Limited.

DEAR SIR: Thank you for being kind to me. I was fond of you. I hope you won't be out of a boy long. There do be a very honest boy named Mickey McGooley goes to my school I used to go to. He has a iron foot, but he is good-looking in the rest of him. I think he would come if you asked him. Please tell the other gentilmen I won't forget him either.

Your respeckful friend,

HUGH.

Ninth Anti-Sassenach Bank, Belfast, Ireland.

SIR: My mother she is named Mrs. M. O'Kinsella, will send you the papers from McClutch and Gullim. As I will be dead you pay my money please to her. I let you know now so that it will be all rite. It began last May 28th and stops Saturday, October 21st. Yours truly, hoping you will send it soon,

Yours,

H. O'KINSELLA.

11 — ST., DUBLIN.

October 22nd, 1893.

DEAR MOTHER: You must cheer up and not cough. You can go to France or somewhere. You will find a heap of lengths of linen stuff in a box under the steps of old Tom's shop. He does n't know about it. It is mine and the nicest they is, and if you don't be wanting it, you can sell it. Then you look in the lining of Danny's cap, and find some bank papers, and you send them to the Ninth anti-Sassenach Bank in Belfast and it will send you nigh twelve pound gold. You will find Winny and me by Richmond Bridge, and it will not be so expensive without us. I hope you won't be low for me, for Nora says she will be good. Dear mother, I didnt know any other way to make you happy and well at this present. Goodbye from your loving son,

HUGH CORMAC FITZEUSTACE LE POER
O'KINSELLA.

After that laborious signature, he folded and addressed the first two sheets, and after a plunge into the recesses of his pocket, stamped them. The last one he slipped beneath his mother's pillow. He looked at her wistfully, lying there on the brink of all compensation, at last! She turned over, and sighed feebly: "Go to bed, Hughey dear." He did not dare to kiss her, for fear she should become wide awake. Back into the shadow he shrank, and so remained a long time. A dim sense of defeat stole over him, like a draught through a crack, from a wind which pushes vainly without. But he had never in his life hugged any thought whose interest centred in himself; and immediately his whole being warmed again with the remembrance that his defeat meant victory for a life dearer to him than his own. When the great bell outside had struck two, he crept across the room.

"Is she ready, Nora?"

"She is, Hughey."

He stooped to the floor, and gathered the drowsy body in his arms. On the landing, one floor below, the little sister

cried aloud. "No, no, no, no!" he crooned, in a passion of apprehension: "Brother will show Winny the bright moon."

They came safely to the street; the moon indeed was there, flooding the world with splendor. When Nora had buttoned Winny's coat, and the boy had posted his letters, they took her by either hand, and started.

Hughey had planned out his difficult campaign to the end, and his brain was quiet and clear. Passing through Church Street, he raised his hat with reverence, as he had always done since he came to Dublin, to a blank stone on the south side in the ancient yard of Saint Michan's; for under that stone, according to a tradition, Robert Emmett's sentinel dust reposes. There on the old Danish ground, at the crisis, Winny's fiery Gaelic temper came again to the fore. Struck with the solitude and the dark, the dread faces of unusual things, and jostled by the wind which pounced at her from its corner lair on the north bank of the river, she hung back and rebelled. "Let me go, let me — go! Hughey! Oh! . . ." The lit-

tle silver lisp arose in very real, in irresistible alarm.

Never once, in all his mistaken planning, had Hughey paused to consider that she had a voice in the matter. If she were unwilling to die for his dearest, why, what right had he, Hughey, though scornful and disappointed because of it, to compel her? After all, she was only seven, and silly! He looked at Nora over the capped head between them. Then he fetched a deep, deep sigh, and the tears came to his eyelids, burned, and dried.

They went on, ever slower; and at Richmond Bridge Hughey spoke to Winny, as he felt that he could do at last, tenderly, and even with humorous understanding. "Now 't is the end o' your walk, an' ye'll trot home wid Nora, and niver moind me at all, dear. Some day she'll be tellin' ye phwhat ye missed." But to Nora herself he said softly:

"Take care o' mother, mavourneen."

"Oi will, Hughey."

She kissed him twice; her smooth cheek against his was cold as a shell. He made a gesture of dismissal, which she

did not disobey; and he watched them go, without further sign. The two childish figures were swallowed by the blue-black shadows, and the pavement under their naked feet gave forth no receding sounds. Yet Hughey, bereft of them so quickly and utterly, listened, listened, tiptoeing to the central arch of the bridge.

The autumnal Sabbath breath of the slumbering capital floated in a faint white mist against the brick and stone. Every high point was alive with light: the masts in port, the roof of the King's Inns, the Park, the top of the Nelson monument, the Castle standard, the high summits of the gracious Wicklow hills. Below were the dim line of Liffey bridges, processional to the sea, and the sad friendly wash of the chilly water. Clear of any regret or self-pity, he would have his farewell grave and calm, and he would set out with the sign of faith. So he knelt down, in prayer, for a moment, and with his eyes still closed, dropped forward.

In another eternal instant, he came into the air. He had a confused sense of being glad for Winny, and otherwise quite satisfied and thankful. There, next the

wall, was a rotten abandoned raft, a chance of life within clutch; he saw it, and smiled. Then Hughey sank, and the black ebb-tide took him.

Nora's knowledge, meanwhile, was too torturing to be borne. No sooner had she left her brother than she caught the heavy little one into her slight arms, and ran. Breathless, and choked with sorrow, she told her mother all she knew, and roused the Drogans, who in turn called up the Smiths, the Fays, the Holahans, the McCarthys. From right and left the neighbors swarmed forth on a vain and too familiar trail: the Spirit of Poverty flying unmercifully ever to the rescue of her own, she

—— “that would upon the rack of this rough world
Stretch them out longer.”

* * * * *

Two of Hughey's letters had to go undelivered: one belonging to a corporation which never existed, and one to a heart-broken woman who set sail for the Isles of Healing, before the dawn.

THE END.

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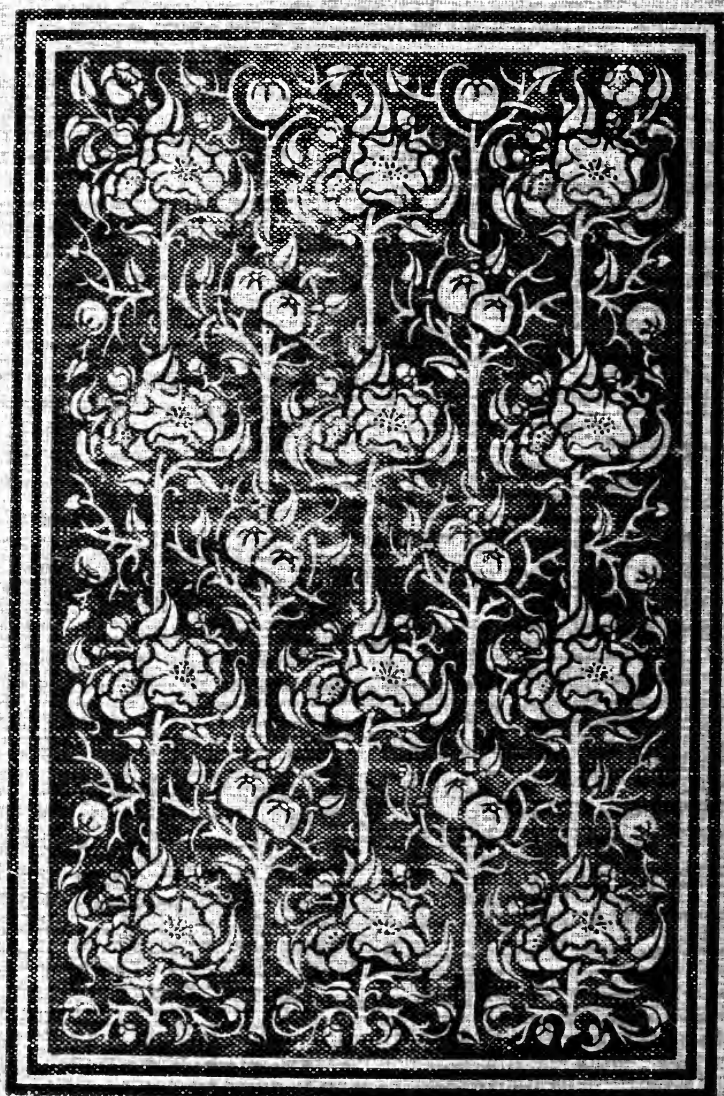
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